

Physical Therapy Students' Attitudes Toward Chiropractic

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Objectives

At the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- describe the existing theories about the tension between the two professions of physical therapy and chiropractic;
- describe the importance of understanding the tension between the two professions; and,
- discuss potential solutions to decrease the tension between the two professions of physical therapy and chiropractic.

The purpose of this study was to explore physical therapy students' attitudes toward chiropractic.

Literature Review

- There is a lack of information in the professional literature regarding the attitudes of physical therapy students toward chiropractic.
- Documentation exists as far back as 1987 describing competition between the professions of chiropractic and physical therapy.

Manceaux, G.D. 1987. Can physical therapists and chiropractors co-exist despite differences? *Journal of Manipulative and Physical Therapeutics*, 10, 260-263.

Literature

- “Many professionals’ attitudes can be attributed to a lack of knowledge of a comparable profession.”

Langworthy J. M., & Smink RD. 2000. Chiropractic through the eyes of physiotherapists, manual therapists, and osteopaths in the Netherlands. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 6, 437- 443.

Literature

- “Researchers and physical therapy have used grounded theory methodology to develop the theories explaining physical therapist attitudes toward professional roles, expert practitioners in physical therapy, and the development of professional ethos in physical therapy.”

Mellion, L. R, & Tovin, M. M. 2002. Grounded theory: A qualitative research methodology for physical therapy. *Physiotherapy Theory and Practice*, 18, 109-120.

Literature

- “...Although there is a great deal of referring of patients and sharing of care between chiropractors and family physicians, the coordination of care for shared patients between these two groups of practitioners is very poor.”

Mainous, A. G., Gill, J. M., Zoller, J. S., & Wolman, M. G. 2000. Fragmentation of patient care between chiropractors and family physicians. *Archives of Family Medicine*, 9, 446-450.

Research Method

- Naturalistic inquiry/ Qualitative research
- Semi-structured Interviews
- Constant-comparative Analysis
- Human Subjects Approval 04/2006

Interview Questions

- What experiences have you had with physical therapy?
- What experiences have you had with chiropractic?
- How did you come to choose your field of study?
- What information has been presented to you in your curriculum about physical therapy?
- What information has been presented to you in your curriculum about chiropractic?
- What or who has influenced your perspective on physical therapy?
- What or who has influenced your perspective on chiropractic?

Participants

- 36 graduate physical therapy students
- 28 females, 8 males
- Ages 22 and 23
- 34 were European-American, one Hispanic-American, one Korean-American

Emergent Themes

- Theme I - Influence of Family and Friends
- Theme II - Temporary Fix
- Theme III - Lack of Information
- Theme IV - Differences in Treatment Goals
- Theme V - PT Curriculum Produced Negative Attitudes

Theme I

Influence of Family and Friends

- Attitudes about chiropractic were influenced by family and friends.
 - “... I think that’s why I can see why people go to it. And from hearing positives from friends and family as well.”
 - “...I work with a girl who waits tables too—[She] went to a chiropractor and practically swears by it—says the chiropractor changed her life....”
 - “...Probably knowing what I know from my friend who’s studying [chiropractic] right now [has] the most influence on [my attitude]...”

Theme II

Temporary Fix

- Chiropractic as a temporary fix.
 - “...You could go to a chiropractor, they might crack your back, and yeah it’ll feel good but they’re not really solving the problem...I was just always under the impression that they aren’t doing anything to really fix it.”
 - “I feel like it’s a one time thing...It’s not like [physical therapy], where if you treat someone, you give them exercises so that they don’t come back with the same problem.”
 - “...I guess I kind of saw [chiropractic] being a more short term fix, if at all.”

Theme III

Lack of Information

- Lack of chiropractic information in coursework
 - “We had a couple of classes that touched on the issue...not a great deal.”
 - “Mostly group presentations, and...one presenter...but not much detail at all I felt.
- Lack of personal experience with chiropractic
 - “...I’ve had no experiences with chiropractic. I’ve never been to one, I’ve never worked with one, and I have never referred to anybody.”
 - “...I have never been...and I don’t really know too much about it, to be honest.”

Theme IV

Difference in Treatment Goals

- “...physical therapy takes a treatment approach that is much more involving patient education, home exercise, a lot more responsibility give to the patient, and ... chiropractics do a more quick, I’m going to fix you and you are going to feel, better...”
- “PT is more movement analysis and then chiropractors... tend to focus in on the spine and how to crack it to make it feel better.”
- “...chiropractic is more of an acute kind of thing, you are dealing with manipulations and stuff like that, where as physical therapy is more long term strengthening, long term stretching...”

Theme V

PT Curriculum Produced Negative Attitudes

- “...I’ve gotten more inflection from professors and you can tell who likes chiropractic, who doesn’t. And who’s had good experiences and bad experiences and overall I think the program has shown a negative view of chiropractors and I think I’ve internalized that a little bit.”
- “All I can really remember is one lecture we had during our spine class... basically the gist that I took away from it [the lecture] was that chiropractors do everything that we do and get paid more money... it was very negative. The class was angry...upon leaving.”

Conclusions

- The majority of participants had exposure to chiropractic through family members or friends who had seen a chiropractor.
- The majority of participants reported that chiropractic was a treatment with temporary effects.

Conclusions

- PT students had limited information in their coursework about chiropractic.
- PT students had lack of personal experience with chiropractic.
- PT students perceived a difference in treatment goals between PT and chiropractic.
- Information received in the PT curriculum resulted in negative attitudes among the PT students.

Recommendations

For the purposes of this study, the researchers make the following recommendations:

- PT programs may want to consider including information regarding chiropractic in the professional curriculum;
- there should be more opportunities for physical therapy students to experience chiropractic;

Recommendations

- faculty members may want to evaluate their own beliefs regarding chiropractic, how they present information to students, and what impact the beliefs will have on students;
- students may want to evaluate their own beliefs regarding chiropractic, how these beliefs are formed, and how they are projected in professional settings; and,
- curricula should include discussions and information on interdisciplinary professional relationships.

Future Research

- Explore chiropractic students' attitudes toward physical therapy.
- Examine ICPT professors' attitudes toward chiropractic.
- Examine the extent to which professors have an influence on students' beliefs.
- Create a quantitative questionnaire based on the themes in this study to include a larger sample size.

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Questions and Thoughts