

# Calling Doctor Pappenfus

## Chiropractors seeks to give his profession a good goose

by MICHAEL FINLEY  
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Like 90 percent of the population, I never visited a chiropractor until this past year, when I met Dr. Mark Pappenfus, who practices from a small office beside a barbershop in Saint Paul's Highland Park. I saw him several times a week. I lay face down on a special padded table, and he "reset" my back using a kind of clicking punch tool called an activator.

I enjoyed the attention and I always left feeling better in my back. I remember feeling disappointed when, after eight weeks of clicking and punching, Pappenfus told me he wasn't doing me any good, and – this is never supposed to happen at a chiropractor's -- sent me home.

What most disappointed me was that it meant no more conversations with Pappenfus. If your dictionary doesn't have a picture of him next to the entry for *earnest*, it is probably obsolete. Pappenfus is a true believer in the healing power of chiropractic care, a man who truly felt called to the healing arts, and he doesn't care who he offends – including his fellow doctors – in trumpeting it. He was once asked to step down from an ethics panel on the basis that he was causing fellow doctors lower back pain.

But people love Mark Pappenfus. Once at his clinic I ran into an MD I know, Katie Guthrie of United Family Practice Health Center on West 7<sup>th</sup> in Saint Paul. Guthrie is not only a patient of his; they are cooking up a common practicum for doctors of medicine and chiropractic to work together, a process allowing each to optimize the skill set of the other.

Likewise, Gert Bronfort, a researcher into chiropractic at Northwest Health Sciences University in Bloomington, is working with investigators at Hennepin County Medical Center and the University of Minnesota, on two studies funded by the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration investigating chiropractic and rehabilitation exercise for back pain and neck pain.

## Dueling cartoons

"I see a lot to like in Mark's kind of chiropractic," Guthrie said. "First, it's safe. Using the activator, Mark can treat even treat people who are in acute pain. Massage therapy and physical therapy often can't do that. Second, chiropractic makes sense to me theoretically, although, coming from the world of medicine, it's like learning a second language."

Example: D.D. Palmer, founder of the chiropractic profession, saw the universe as divided into Intelligence (or Energy, or God) and Matter. Medical doctors therefore focus on what is the Matter with us, while chiropractors attend to the God. [Source: Wardwell book]

Minnesotans may not fully appreciate the fact, but this is chiropractic country. The idea, only 110 years of age, started in Iowa. Doctors of chiropractic were under attack almost from the first, especially in the medically well-supported eastern states. “But the further west one goes,” Pappenfus says, “the more empowered chiropractors are under law. In Washington State, they’re allowed to perform surgeries. Here in Minnesota we’re allowed to draw blood. We don’t do it, but we are allowed to!”

People associate chiropractic with spinal issues, Pappenfus said, “but that’s not how we started. Chiropractic actually began as an investigation into restoring hearing loss.” A closer definition, Pappenfus said, would be that chiropractic is about neural flow, which centers in the brain and spine but is systemwide to the body. Chiropractic believes that energy flows through the body, but that we kink up or subluxate along the way, and these kinks must be worked out to restore healthful flow.

Conventional medicine, of course, is highly skeptical of this paradigm, and over the years the two overlapping healthcare delivery systems have had a fine time bashing one another to smithereens. Chiropractic’s cartoon of medicine is that of a big bully, forever trying to force pills down patients’ gullets. Medicine’s cartoon of chiropractic is that they are faith-based manipulators (in the worst sense of the word) who, once they catch a patient, never release it again into the wild.

Over the years, many unkind things have occurred. In the early days, medical doctors had chiropractors tried for practicing medicine without a license. Pappenfus clutches a heavily-highlighted copy of Walter Wardell’s book *Chiropractic: History and Evolution of a New Profession*, which chronicles the insults suffered at the hands of their medical brethren, culminating in the Supreme Court letting stand a restraint-of-trade judgment in 1990 against the American Medical Association. For chiropractors it was the equivalent of the Red Sea parting.

So we have the spectacle of two professions, one big and priestlike in its science, and the other puny but doggedly persistent, and confident of its own truth. Ten to twelve percent of Americans are comfortable seeing chiropractors – about the same percentage as use Macs over Windows. Is there any way to objectively evaluate which of these truths is really true?

## **Cracking the numbers**

Yes, according to Joseph Sweere, chiropractor and professor at Northwest Health Sciences University. Independent consultants moved a mountain of data a decade ago to report to the Canadian government, in a document known as the Manga Report. This report, named by chief investigator Pran Manga, concluded that lower back pain was one of the most expensive costs in healthcare, because it is so resistant to treatment. But of all

the approaches Manga and company studied, chiropractic care was the most effective, and the most cost-efficient. [Source: I have a copy of the Manga Report, published August, 1993; it's also online] To update these figures, back pain costs amount to \$90 billion in the U.S. annually, with about 26 billion going to treatment. [Source: January 2004 issue of *Spine*].

“Things are as different as night and day” from the contentiousness of yesteryear, said Sweere. “Over 500 hospitals nationwide have chiropractors on staff. We’re integrated into the military healthcare system. Over 90 doctors practice in Naval hospitals alone. Medical schools are starting to teach alternative therapies like massage and acupuncture. There’s a powerful wave of interest in alternative care, and chiropractic has benefited from that.”

“In the end,” said Sweere, “most people go by what they have personal experience of. If you have experienced one kind of therapy and benefited, you have confidence in it. If you haven’t, you probably don’t.”

“One common way to integrate,” according to Mark Agre, a medical doctor with PDR Midway in Saint Paul, “has been for a chiropractic group practice to hire an MD for internal referrals.” His own clinic, specializing in musculoskeletal health, includes chiropractor Richard Zarmbinski, and once included Mark Pappenfus.

“I’m an exercise guy,” Agre said. “I like people to get better by being more active. But often we have patients who benefit more from the passive approach, and chiropractic works well for them.” In any event, he said, it is good for the two professions to work hand in hand, because patients relying on the wrong one can see their window of healing opportunity close before they get referred to the right one.

“We have no set paradigm,” said Zarmbinski, who has an MD degree as well as being a chiropractor. “I can teach exercises, but physical therapists are much better at that, and at strengthening. The focus is on what’s best for the patient.”

## **Results and money**

As for Pappenfus, when I visited him he was packing up his office. “I’m going to work for corporate America,” he laughed. This was like hearing that John the Baptist owned his own bowling ball. Pappenfus wasn’t at liberty to say which Fortune 500 companies were bringing him aboard to help keep a lid on back pain costs, but he did allow that one makes lawnmowers and the other makes pickup trucks.

“You know, in the end it’s all about results and money,” he said. He is ecstatic about the opportunity to show what chiropractic can do, and to take that back to his fellow doctors and exhort them to change.

“The future of chiropractic could go any of a number of ways,” he said. “We could wind up with a place at the table, or with a table all to ourselves. We may be seen as leaders of the holistic health movement. Or we could stick with our neuromusculoskeletal niche, and be content with being subspecialists.

“I know some people think I’m pretty wacko,” said Pappenfus. “But the present day is a lot like chiropractic’s earliest days. People are interested in health, and they are demanding answers. So we have to move beyond the politics and give them what they are crying out for.

“My goal is to teach, to harangue, and to swell the ranks of the 10 to 12 percent who swear by chiropractic. If we attend to our image,” Dr. Pappenfus said, “we can double that number.”

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Michael Finley lives and writes in Saint Paul, Minnesota. He is co-author of *The Accidental Leader* (Jossey-Bass, 2003) Visit him at <http://mfinley.com>, or write him at [mfinley@mfinley.com](mailto:mfinley@mfinley.com).

## SIDEBARS

### **Back pain, stat!**

[Source: [http://www.worksafebc.com/back\\_at\\_work/back\\_pain\\_basics/baw\\_10\\_30.asp](http://www.worksafebc.com/back_at_work/back_pain_basics/baw_10_30.asp)]

- From 1997-2001, the average amount of days lost due to back injuries was 45 days.
- From 30 to 40 percent of all workplace absences are due to back pain.
- Back strain accounts for one-quarter of all workers compensation claims.
- More than 90 percent of lower back pain cases have no specific cause (such as infection, osteoporosis, arthritis, etc.). In these cases the pain will usually subside without treatment in four to six weeks.

### **Chiropractors vs MDs**

- Chiropractors require 2 to 4 years of undergraduate education, completion of a 4-year chiropractic college course, and passing scores on national and State examinations. <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos071.htm> Physicians require 4 years of undergraduate school, 4 years of medical school, and 3 to 8 years of internship and residency.
  - The median salary for a chiropractor was \$65,330 in 2002, compared to a family practice physician’s median salary of \$150,265 [U.S. Department of Labor] <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos074.htm> and <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos071.htm>
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