

Can You Predict a Favorable Treatment Outcome After the First Chiropractic Visit?

By Dr. Ken Spresser

According to Dr. Iben Axen, D.C. et al, it is possible to predict, among chiropractic patients with persistent low back pain which patients will report definite improvement early in the course of treatment (JMPT, September 2002).

Commonly in the treatment of low back pain, almost all chiropractic patients receive spinal manipulation often with physical therapy modalities, advice, and exercises. Manipulation, however, is the mainstay for most chiropractors. It does not always work out perfectly! Chiropractors have developed their own set of predictors, e.g. a favorable prognosis of patients who report some improvement early in treatment like the reduction of local pain.

Low back pain is in itself difficult to study and treat. We all have different approaches so this study only has to do with the prediction of early recovery in patients with persistent low back pain. Dr. Axen et al created two response profiles based on clinical experience and intuition. A “good prognosis” is one where there is immediate improvement on the first treatment and/or a common reaction after the first treatment followed by improvement at the second treatment. A “poor prognosis” is one where there was no immediate improvement at the first treatment and/or an uncommon reaction after the first treatment and no improvement reported at the second visit.

The study patients had low back pain from two to four weeks in the prior year with no chiropractic treatment in the proceeding three months. Treatment was provided at the discretion of the treating chiropractor. As a result of the questionnaires completed by the patients an “intermediate prognostic” group was created for those who did not fit into the most favorable or the least favorable prognostic groups. A total of 92% received spinal manipulative therapy. The results of the studies showed that of the patients in the most favorable prognostic group, 84% reported definitely improved by the fourth visit. In the intermediate prognostic group, 63% reported definitely improved by the fourth visit and 30% of the least favorable prognostic group reported definite improvement. This was based on the reaction after the first treatment.

Truthfully our profession is short on studies of predictors of treatment. To the delight of the authors, the data actually matched clinical experience. By becoming familiar with the prognostication suggested by this study, chiropractors should go “all out” with their ability with the use of manipulation, physical therapy and advice especially on the first visit.

Reference:

“Can Patient Reactions to the First Chiropractic Treatment Predict Early Favorable Treatment Outcome Persistent Low Back Pain?”

Iben Axen et al, JMPT, September, 2002, Volume 25, #7, Pages 450-454