

CHIROPRACTIC CARE IN THE ELDERLY

All around the world there is a trend of an increasing number of older adults. It is estimated that by the year 2030 one in five residents in the U.S. is expected to be over 65 years of age. With this increase in a geriatric population the need for appropriate care of the ailments of the elderly needs to be addressed urgently.

As can be expected, health complaints related to the skeletal (bones and joints) and muscle systems increase with age. In a Canadian study 30% of seniors above 75 years of age reported suffering from mild, moderate or severe pain. Worldwide, musculoskeletal conditions are the most common causes of severe long term pain and physical disability. Joint diseases account for half of all chronic conditions in people aged 60 and over. Twenty-five percent of people 60 and over have significant pain and disability from osteoarthritis. Low back pain and back problems rank third for women and fourth for men as a leading cause for chronic health problems in adults over age 65. Pain and functional limitation as a result of these disorders like osteoarthritis can profoundly affect the quality of life, as it affects mobility, functional and social independence, activities of daily living and sleep patterns. In addition it can lead to increased prescription and over the counter drug use. Chronic pain also has the potential to affect an individual's psychological well-being and is a predictor for depression.

Chiropractors can play an important role in health promotion, injury and disease prevention in the elderly, due to their conservative practice style and holistic health approach. Chiropractic care offers safe and effective conservative therapy for musculoskeletal conditions of the spine, peripheral joints and muscles. Chiropractic services have proven to be a relatively low-cost health care alternative with high patient satisfaction. Various lower-force chiropractic techniques are available as safe alternatives to drugs and surgery for musculoskeletal complaints in the older patient. Due to the prevalence of these conditions in older patients, and the success of chiropractic in caring for these patients, it is advisable to include the doctor of chiropractic in interdisciplinary geriatric health care teams. Chiropractors, well trained in health assessment, diagnosis, radiographic studies, health promotion, and illness prevention, are well-positioned to provide many primary health-care services to aging patients.

Chiropractors adapt their core treatment modality of joint manipulation to specifically fit the needs of the elderly patient by making use of a variety of gentle adjusting techniques, including instrument-assisted manipulation, using specialized tables and padded wedges to optimize the benefits of the treatment. In addition chiropractors advise their patients to engage in physical activity and recommend physical rehabilitation and therapeutic exercises to maintain mobility and improve gait, balance, co-ordination, reaction time and muscle strength. The treatment goals, besides pain control, are to limit functional decline and activity avoidance. A chiropractic practitioner is trained to counsel the elderly patient on fall prevention and give other lifestyle recommendations. Most chiropractors will also offer nutritional advice and suggest appropriate nutritional supplements to assist in bone, joint and muscle health, as well as general well-being.

A recent study found chiropractic geriatric patients "less likely to have been hospitalized, less likely to have used a nursing home, more likely to report a better health status, more likely to exercise vigorously, and more likely to be mobile in the community."

This indicates the important role chiropractors can play in the management of health conditions in senior patients and shows the wellness benefits that chiropractic care offers to patients, especially elderly ones.

For more information, please feel welcome to contact the Namibian Chiropractic Association with registered practitioners in Windhoek, Swakopmund, Walvisbay and Rundu.

