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A Model for Chiropractic Practice Growth

The Medical Industry Challenges for Chiropractors



Due largely to financial incentives and practice developments, mainstream medicine is focused on a “fix what’s broken” model. Patients are encouraged to wait until something has gone seriously wrong to seek care. Once it has, there is an emphasis on invasive, costly procedures and pharmaceutical solutions. What is needed is a widespread focus on preventive care and lifestyle changes that could reduce illness and injury as well as on appropriate levels of care.

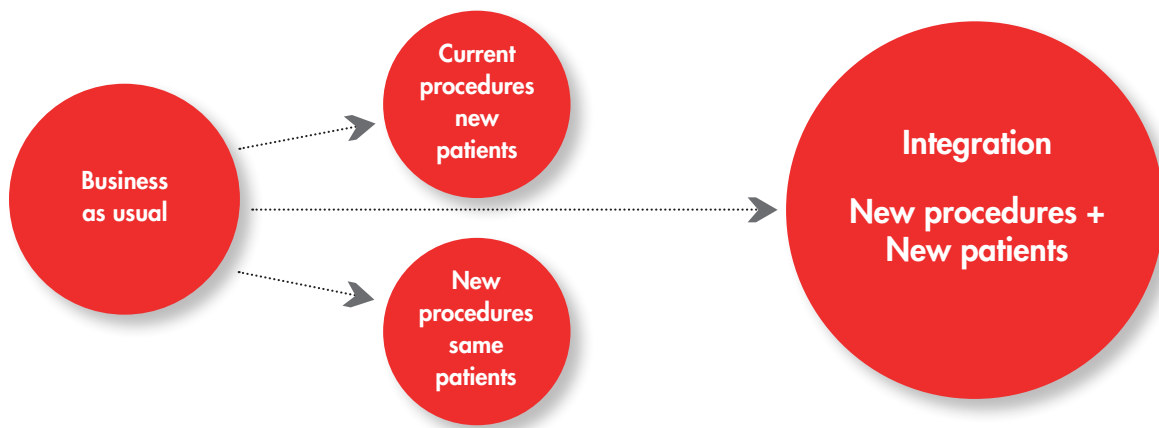
The current common approach to health care is the very model used by plumbers, electricians and mechanics: Wait until something breaks and then rush in to fix it. This can be a costly prospect as small problems create larger ones that reveal themselves often at inconvenient times. In fact, in some ways we do better by our cars because we monitor the gauges and routinely change the oil. There are warning lights when your tires are low or you’re about to run out of gas. What if we could do that for our health?

The tendency toward fixing rather than preventing or finding other options can be seen in the rise of prescription drugs. Doctors prescribe opioids to an estimated 1 out of 5 patients for pain relief not associated with cancer, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The cost of the prescription opioid epidemic is an estimated \$78.5 billion, according to the American Public Health Association.

Chiropractors and other alternative practitioners offer an important counterbalance to the common medical model with an emphasis on wellness, early intervention and options to surgery and pharmaceuticals. Chiropractic care emerged in the 19th century as an unconventional therapy and remained marginalized through the 20th century, but has become more widely valued for its nonsurgical methods. (*Source – NIH, BLS*)

And yet, challenges remain. While Chiropractors have become more accepted as a part of the continuum of care, they may be viewed as a secondary alternative limiting their appeal to a broad patient base. Additionally, there are ongoing concerns around insurance coverage and reimbursement for the procedures and treatments offered by chiropractors resulting in a need to rely more heavily on direct payments from patients. While there has been more collaboration in recent years between chiropractors and other providers, establishing and maintaining these relationships can be difficult.

Chiropractors have limited options for growth. They can continue with current procedures and focus on programs to add new patients, which is business as usual. Or, they can add new procedures for current patients. But there is another way. Through integration, a practice can add new patients and new procedures, paving the way for greater, faster growth.



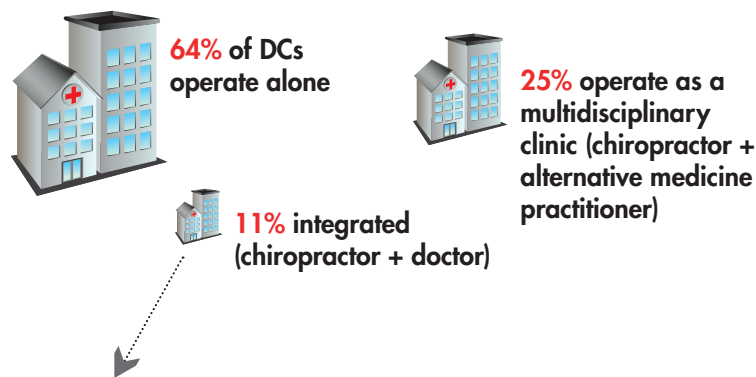
In this environment, chiropractors may benefit from changing their approach and adopting an integrated practice partnering with other providers, allowing them to combine traditional medicine with their less invasive approach enhancing their revenue potential and providing more comprehensive care to patients.

Defining an Integrated Practice

An integrated practice involves various providers working together. It could be as simple as a chiropractor and a nurse practitioner or a chiropractor and a medical doctor. It could include several types of providers such as a chiropractor, physical therapists, acupuncturist and nutritionist.

The concept is that the practice can offer a wider range of services that will appeal to a greater number of patients. The number of integrated practices has been growing.

According to the Chiropractic Economics Salary Survey 2017:



How a typical Integrated Practice Works:

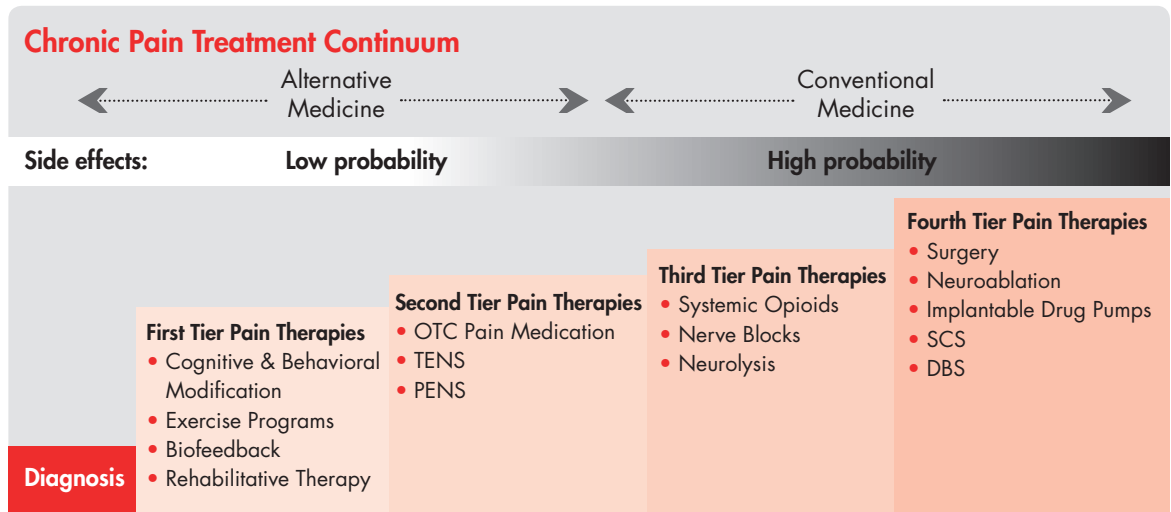
- The chiropractor takes on the role of chief executive and shifts to a staff-driven practice.
- Patients initially see a medical doctor or other medical practitioner for a diagnostic examination.
- Practitioners discuss treatment options, which may include chiropractic care and other forms of nontraditional care.
- The care plan takes a wholistic approach combing several viewpoints.

The Advantages of Integration

Integration enables a more comprehensive continuum of care. Instead of one approach, there is an opportunity to consider more options and find the best one for the patient. More perspectives are brought into the mix and the patient can easily be treated by the appropriate care givers as they consult with each other offering important insights.

Consider what happens with chronic pain treatment. The available treatments fall along a continuum starting with first tier therapies such as exercise, cognitive and behavioral modification and biofeedback. The therapies are increasingly invasive until you reach the fourth tier including surgery, neuroablation and implantable drug pumps. Medical doctors typically provide care in the higher tiers starting with prescribing pain medication including opioids. Conversely, DCs would start with the lower tiers.

Through integration, a practice can draw in more patients and provide a full range of care enabling the DC to become the portal-of-entry doctor ensuring that patients will have easy access to more extensive care if needed. Thus, they can promote wellness and have the ability to do so at all phases of patient care.



Notes:

NSAIDS - Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug

TENS - Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation

PENS - Percutaneous electrical nerve stimulation

SCS - Spinal Cord Stimulation

DBS - Deep Brain Stimulation

Integrating can strengthen the position of a practice in the market place as it is able to reach a wider range of patients and care for them longer as a full-service provider. Rather than having to send a patient elsewhere, the practice can provide services in a setting that is familiar and comfortable for the patient. Providers can consult with one another. Records are kept on location reducing the need for duplicative tests.

An integrated practice can have greater appeal since nearly the entire population may seek medical care but just 14 percent sought chiropractic care, according to the Gallup-Palmer College of Chiropractic Annual Report.

More than two-thirds of adults in the U.S. who have not seen a chiropractor in the last 12 months said they would be more likely to go to a chiropractor if they knew the provider would work closely with their other doctors.

An integrated practice can provide greater financial opportunities. In general, their billing rates are higher, as are salaries for chiropractors.

Billings:

Integrated Practice	\$909,000
Multidisciplinary Practice	\$659,000
Solo Practice	\$478,000

Salaries and total compensation:

Integrated DC	\$137,500
Multidisciplinary	\$110,400
DC Solo Practice	\$101,900

Source: Chiropractic Economics Salary Survey 2017

Is Integration the Best Option?

While integration can offer advantages, it is not the best option for everyone. There are several things to consider in making this decision, according to those who have been through it and offer guidance.

Before you move ahead with integration, take into consideration:

What are the regulations in your state? States have different rules about who can own and manage a medical practice. There are also legal requirements to meet insurance requirements. You will need to know who can practice in what setting and how everything can be billed.

What is your management style? Integrating requires being able to collaborate and delegate.

How will you handle the administrative changes? Having an integrated practice will mean having more employees, more paperwork and additional administrative duties.

Where will the practice be located? You may need additional space, which could require renovating or moving.

Do you have the financial resources for the integration? There will be additional expenses through the transition, and this can be higher if you need to renovate or build out a new space. You may also need to make an upfront investment in equipment, marketing and staff.

Will your EHR System need to be updated? When you have a practice with multiple providers and potentially more referrals to specialists, it is more important that you have an efficient system.

As a prerequisite, experts recommend that a practice have the following before proceeding with integration:

- A minimum of 12,000 square feet
- 80 to 100 patients a week
- 4 to 6 months of financial reserves to cover additional overhead while the new model gets off the ground.
- A plan for compliance to state and local regulations

Finding the Right Partners

As you move ahead, you will need to find the right candidates for this new venture. Experts advise looking for people who understand and support your approach as a DC. It may take multiple interviews and discussions with references.

Look for someone who is a good fit with your style and the office environment as well as skilled in caring for patients.

Hiring an Integration Firm

There are several entities dedicated to helping chiropractors grow their business through integration. These companies can be helpful in providing legal guidance as well as business expertise. The fees will vary along with the level of services.

When evaluating a firm, talk to other chiropractors who have used it. Make sure you understand what the firm will do for you and what you will have to take responsibility for.

Questions to ask of an integration company:

- What is your experience?
- With whom have you worked?
- What are the limitations and opportunities in this state?
- What parts will you manage?
- What will the cost of integration be?

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