

## LOW BACK PAIN: THE ACUTE MANAGEMENT OF PATIENTS WITH CHRONIC (LONGER THAN 6 WEEKS) NON-SPECIFIC LOW BACK PAIN - GUIDELINES FROM NICE - PUBLISHED 28<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2009

In developing these guidelines, which can be viewed on <http://www.nice.org.uk>, NICE has assessed the effectiveness, safety and cost-effectiveness of available treatments. Their recommendations have been produced to deliver a high impact on patients' outcomes; to reduce variation in the treatments offered; to lead to a more efficient use of NHS resources and to promote patient choice, ensuring more rapid progression through care pathways.

In considering appropriate manual therapy for the acute management of low back pain, NICE has specifically recommended spinal manipulation as a leading treatment modality.

Specific recommendations from the Guidelines for Health professionals include:-

- Advise people with low back pain that staying physically active as much as possible is likely to help and provide people with advice and information to help them manage their low back pain.
- Offer one of the following treatment options, taking into the account the patients preference;
- An exercise programme, a course of manual therapy including manipulation or a course of acupuncture.
- Consider offering another of these options if the chosen treatment does not result in satisfactory improvement
- Consider offering a structured exercise programme tailored to the individual that may include exercise to strengthen muscles, improve posture and stretching.
- Consider offering a course of manual therapy, including spinal manipulation, spinal mobilisation and massage.

The majority of spinal manipulative services in the UK are provided by chiropractors, osteopaths and some physiotherapists who have been specifically trained in manipulation who, in the main, work in community-based private practice. The British Chiropractic Association; of which I am a member, believes that wider provision of spinal manipulative therapy services by the NHS could be achieved by contracting with chiropractors currently working within the private sector.

Chiropractors, who are statutorily regulated primary health care practitioners, are able to offer a package of care that includes the assessment of patients, diagnosis and selection of appropriate treatment that may include spinal manipulation, structured exercise programmes and in some cases acupuncture (dry needling) which is consistent with the recommendations of NICE. Chiropractic is statutorily regulated by the General Chiropractic Council (GCC) and all registered chiropractors must comply with the detailed Code of Practice and Standard of Proficiency which is prescribed by the GCC. Chiropractors are also required by statute to undertake Continuing Professional Development as a requirement for annual registration.

The benefit to the NHS of using chiropractors to provide spinal manipulative care is that it gives GPs and patients the choice of immediate treatment which is available within the local community and is based on need rather than ability to pay. Studies have shown high satisfaction from patients with this type of service when compared with conventional hospital out patient treatment (*Meade et al - published in the British Medical Journal in 1990 and 1995 and the UK Beam Trial; Back pain, exercise and manipulation (UK BEAM) randomised trial: effectiveness of physical treatments for back pain in primary care. British Medical Journal in November 2004*).