

THE NEW ZEALAND COMMISSION REPORT

New Zealand Report. Hasselberg PD. Government Printer, Wellington - 1979.

Chiropractic Care Found to be Safe and Effective at Treating Low Back Pain

This 377 page report, Chiropractic In New Zealand, was the most comprehensive and detailed independent examination of chiropractic ever undertaken at that time. The report withstood judicial hearings and extensive investigations by the Commission in New Zealand, the United States, Canada, England and Australia.

According to the researchers,

"We entered into our inquiry in early 1978. We had no clear idea what might emerge. We knew little about chiropractors. None of us had undergone any personal experience of chiropractic treatment. If we had any general impression of chiropractic it was probably that shared by many in the community: that chiropractic was an unscientific cult, not to be compared with orthodox medical or paramedical services. We might well have thought that chiropractors were people with perhaps a strong urge for healing, who had for some reason not been able to get into a field recognized by orthodox medicine and who had found an outlet outside the fringes of orthodoxy."

"But as we prepared ourselves for this inquiry it became apparent that much lay beneath the surface of these apparently simple terms of reference. In the first place it transpired that for many years chiropractors had been making strenuous efforts to gain recognition and acceptance as members of the established health care team. Secondly, it was clear that organized medicine in New Zealand was adamantly opposed to this on a variety of grounds which appeared logical and responsible. Thirdly, however, it became only too plain that the argument had been going on ever since chiropractic was developed as an individual discipline in the late 1800's, and that in the years between then and now the debate had generated considerable more heat than light."

"By the end of the inquiry we found ourselves irresistibly and with complete unanimity drawn to the conclusion that modern chiropractic is a soundly based and valuable branch of the health care in a specialized area..."

Their report includes the following findings:

- Chiropractic is a branch of the healing arts specializing in the correction by spinal manual therapy of what chiropractors identify as biomechanical disorders of the spinal column - they carry out spinal diagnosis and therapy at a sophisticated and refined level;
- Chiropractors are the only health practitioners who are necessarily equipped by their education and training to carry out spinal manual therapy;
- General medical practitioners and physiotherapists have no adequate training in spinal manual therapy;
- Spinal manual therapy in the hands of a registered chiropractor is safe;
- The education and training of a registered chiropractor are sufficient to enable him/her to determine whether there are contraindications to spinal manual therapy in a particular case, and whether the patient should have medical care instead of or as well as chiropractic care;
- Spinal manual therapy can be effective in relieving musculoskeletal symptoms, such as back pain and other symptoms known to respond to such therapy, such as migraine;

- In a limited number of cases where there are organic and/or visceral symptoms, chiropractic treatment may provide relief, but this is unpredictable, and in such cases the patient should be under concurrent medical care if that is practicable;
- In the public interest and in the interests of patients, there must be no impediment to full professional cooperation between chiropractors and medical practitioners;
- It is wrong that the present law, or any medical ethical rules, should have the effect that a patient can receive spinal manual therapy which is subsidized by a health benefit only from those health professionals least qualified to deliver it;
- The responsibility for spinal manual therapy training, because of its specialized nature, should lie with the chiropractic profession and part-time or vacation courses in spinal manual therapy for other health professionals should not be encouraged.