

In Touch

Keeping you In Touch
with what's happening
in the world of
Health Care

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■ The Chiropractic role in emergency response

The April 19, 2004 issue of the *Journal of Vertebral Subluxation Research* provides us with an interesting article on the emergency response of chiropractors and the ensuing coordination efforts with government agencies in New York and Washington, DC after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

In the afternoon after the attacks, New York area chiropractors began showing up at the scene as the recovery process got underway. Initially, the chiropractors had to talk their way past security barricades and set up their adjusting tables wherever they could, often in the streets around Ground Zero. Similar efforts were also underway in Washington, DC.

Eventually, through the efforts of the New York Chiropractic Council and the International Chiropractors Association (ICA) an alliance with the American Red Cross allowed full access credentials to the chiropractic volunteers. The NY Council and the ICA established a huge network of chiropractors known as the *Chiropractic Relief Effort at Ground Zero and the Pentagon*.

How successful were the efforts? In New York, at the five official sites manned around the clock, 1,500 chiropractors donated \$1.5 million in services by adjusting up to 500 people per day during the formal chiropractic relief effort beginning September 28, 2001 through May 30, 2002 when all Ground Zero work was completed.

The Red Cross evaluation of the effort concluded “the most ‘successful’ volunteers...were those who were able to work with minimal supervision by official emergency workers. Far from requiring supervision, the chiropractor required only space in which to work and some pallets on which to place his [adjusting table]. In other words, the incorporation of these volunteers into the response required little or no effort on the part of emergency managers...”

The report goes on to say that chiropractors “allied themselves with the Red Cross initially in order to maintain access to the facility, but they were able to offer a specific skill, which even if not planned for in advance, seemed useful to those who already had access.” ▲

■ Millions of Pap smears done needlessly

The June 2004 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that nearly 11 million women who have had their cervix removed are still getting a Pap smear screening test to see if they have developed cancer of the cervix.

Study author Brenda Sirovich of Dartmouth Medical School in Hanover, New Hampshire says it’s possible “that women who have had a total hysterectomy [in which the cervix is removed] are not aware that they are no longer at risk for cervical cancer.” Remarkably she goes on to say the unnecessary testing may be the patients fault since “they may simply be so enthusiastic about cancer screening that they continue to have Pap smears regardless of the usefulness of the test.”

She does admit “it is also possible that physicians are largely responsible for continuing cervical cancer screening after hysterectomy.”

In 1996 a U.S. task force on preventative health recommended that Pap smear screening to test for cancer of the cervix be discontinued in women who have had their cervix removed. ▲

“Good is not good, where better
is expected.”

—Thomas Fuller

■ Consumer group urges ban of cholesterol drug

In a letter to the June 2004 issue of the British journal *The Lancet* the consumer advocate group Public Citizen called for a ban of the cholesterol drug Crestor, claiming that the drug causes life-threatening side effects. Crestor was approved for use in the United States in August 2003.

All of the cholesterol drugs known as statins carry a risk of muscle damage but Crestor has a higher risk and can also damage the kidneys. Public Citizen spokesman Dr. Sidney Wolfe says, "everywhere you turn there are ads for Crestor and there is no question that those ads help to sell drugs, but what patients have not known and what I think a lot of doctors have not known is that the drug has unique risks."

Not surprisingly, the company that makes Crestor claims the drug has been tested and is comparable to other statins in safety.

13 million people are currently taking statins and sales of statin drugs now total \$14 billion a year. ▲

■ Doctors still not washing hands

A report in the July 6, 2004 issue of the *Annals of Internal Medicine* discusses why doctors still are not following hospital handwashing guidelines.

In the study, adherence to handwashing guidelines averaged 57%. Internists had the highest rate of adherence at 87% and anesthesiologists had the lowest at only 23%.

The reasons doctors gave for not washing their hands included having a busy work schedule and being in a technical specialty like surgery or anesthesiology.

The reasons doctors stuck with the guidelines included being watched, setting a role model for their colleagues,

having a positive attitude toward handwashing after patient contact and easy access to a sink.

In a related editorial, Dr. Robert A Weinstein of Rush Medical College in Chicago says, "after more than 150 years of prodding, cajoling, educating, observing, and surveying physicians, hand hygiene adherence rates remain disgracefully low. We must change the rules so that health care workers expect to be observed (when washing their hands) and given direct, immediate feedback until the behavior or role models becomes everyone's ritual."

Commentary: That doctors would have to be stood over and watched like a five year-old to make sure they **wash their hands** after coming into contact with a patient before seeing the next one makes us feel like we just want to go wash our own hands. ▲

■ Needle biopsy linked to spread of breast cancer

The June 2004 *Archives of Surgery* reports that having breast cancer tissue biopsied with a needle seems to increase the chance that the disease will spread to the lymph nodes in the armpit known as sentinel nodes.

The research was done by Dr. Nora Hansen of the John Wayne Cancer Institute at Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica, California. She studied 663 women with proven breast cancer. About half of the cancers were biopsied with a needle while the remainder had the tumor removed and then checked for cancer cells.

Women who had the needle biopsy were 50% more likely to have cancer in the sentinel nodes.

The researchers felt that this was "due in part to the mechanical disruption of the tumor by the needle." ▲

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