

In Touch

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

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■ Spinal hygiene instruction improves quality of life

The August 16, 2004 issue of the *Journal of Vertebral Subluxation Research* reports that people who participated in a spinal hygiene class showed an improvement in the quality of their life as measured by quality of life questionnaires.

In the study, 50 adults who were students at a chiropractic college enrolled in a Spinal Hygiene public health course. 63 adult students who had not taken the Spinal Hygiene class served as a control group.

The class taught proper stretching and exercise, improving posture, stress reduction, ergonomics, patient self-responsibility and appropriate professional spinal evaluation and care.

Two Quality of Life surveys were given at the beginning and end of the class as well as at the end of each week. The Global Well-Being Scale (GWBS) is a version of the Visual Analog Scale (VAS). Also used was the Rand SF 36 Health Survey. The survey tests were designed to measure such things as physical functioning, body pain, general health, vitality, and social, mental and emotional health.

With the Rand 36 test, comparing week 8 scores with week 1 scores show that “six of the eight scales demonstrate statistically significant improvement for the spinal hygiene group. None of the scales demonstrated statistically significant improvement for the control group.”

The Global Well-Being Scale test showed score improvements for each of the weeks observed. “In nine of ten weeks the improvements noted were statistically significant.”

Commentary: It's no surprise that when people are taught proper spinal hygiene the quality of their life improvements in quality of life and health even in a

chiropractic college where presumably the subjects were already under chiropractic care. The next time your chiropractor has a spinal health care class, consider going and taking your whole family. ▲

■ Preventable medical error death estimates double

On July 27, 2004 the news service *HealthDayNews* reported that the estimated number of people in the United States who die each year from preventable medical errors in hospitals has more than doubled from previous estimates of 98,000 per year to more than 195,000.

The previous estimate came from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) in 1999. The current report was produced by HealthGrades, Inc., a health-quality ratings company. IOM representatives confirmed the new estimates saying their 1999 estimates were always considered to be on the conservative side.

In the study, 37 million Medicare patient hospital records from 2000 to 2002 were reviewed. The data showed there were about **1.14 million “safety-related incidents” associated with 323,993 deaths**. 81% of those deaths were specifically attributable to an incident. One in every four Medicare patients who experienced an incident died.

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“Action springs not from
thought, but from a readiness
for responsibility.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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The report also found that 60% of all “safety-related incidents” were the result of “failure to rescue” (that is, the failure to diagnose and treat a condition that developed in the hospital), bedsores and post-operative sepsis and infection.

According to the authors, during the time frame of the study, 2000 to 2002, the 575,000 preventable deaths that occurred cost American consumers an extra \$19 billion.

Lead author, Dr. Samantha Collier said, “The magnitude of this is significant. We need to address this and we need to have support from the medical community.”

“I think it’s a safe bet to say that we’ve maybe gotten a little complacent about patient safety in the medical community, and this is just re-sparking and refueling debate around how to address this,” she said. “Hopefully, it is creating a sense of urgency.” ▲

■ Painkillers for knee pain no better than placebo

The August 2004 issue of the *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases* reports that common painkillers containing acetaminophen are no more effective at relieving symptoms of osteoarthritis of the knee than a sugar pill.

779 patients with knee pain of at least 30 on a 100 point scale during physical activity were observed in the study. The participants were randomly assigned to be given 4 grams per day of acetaminophen (Tylenol) for six weeks or an inactive placebo. The level of improvement the observers were aiming for was a 30% decrease in pain.

52.6% of the acetaminophen group reached this level of relief. 51.9% of the placebo group reached the same level taking the inactive placebo, with an insignificant difference of only .7%. ▲

■ Hospital accrediting agency misses problems

A July 2004 report by the *United States Government Accountability Office* (GAO) says that the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, which is responsible for inspecting hospitals and approving them to receive Medicare payments, missed many potentially dangerous problems during routine inspections.

The commission is a private organization made up of 28 people representing doctors, other health care professionals and hospitals. It is the only accrediting agency the government has no authority over and hospitals approved by the commission are automatically eligible to participate in Medicare.

Problems the commission missed included substandard patient care, medications being given without physician orders, unsanitary environments that enabled transmission of infections and communicable diseases, failed medical instrument sterilization programs and unsafe fire conditions.

82% of hospitals in the U.S. were approved by the commission in 2002.

U.S. Representative Pete Stark of California is co-sponsor of legislation introduced that will increase Medicare’s authority over the commission. “While more may need to be done, the legislation we’re introducing today will improve accountability by establishing a clear chain of command within the hospital oversight process. It will help assure that taxpayer dollars are being spent in facilities that meet Medicare’s standards.” ▲

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Responsibility. Get There
Healthy!*

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