

Our culture of research

Dr. Ayla Azad, DC*



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Chair, Research Committee
Ontario Chiropractic Association

I got involved in chiropractic research by accident. After graduating from Palmer College in 1995, I decided to take a part-time job at the Palmer Research Center while I looked for an Associateship out in the field. My job was to scan B.J. Palmer's patient files that were found in an elevator shaft at the college. I was amazed at what I found in

those files. All patients had a full medical work up including blood work, and urinalysis before and after receiving a chiropractic adjustment. There was a tremendous amount of data included in each file. B.J. Palmer had a team of medical doctors and nurses working with him. He already had a "family health team" of sorts all those years ago! He was already collecting data and doing research before the term "evidence based" was even around. That project made me realise how important it was that we continue on this research path, that we continue to question and learn, just like B.J. Palmer was doing all those years ago. I was amazed that B.J. was so interested in research and collaborative care. Within a few months I found myself fully immersed into the "Chiropractic research world." I worked with some amazing chiropractic researchers like Drs. Cheryl Hawk, Lisa Killinger, Charles Henderson, Bill Meeker et al.! I learned about research principles, publishing, grant writing, presenting and realised why there weren't many chiropractic researchers – research is hard and requires such a huge amount of commitment and dedication, not everyone can do it.

The "chiropractic research world" was very small when I was involved. I remember going to conferences and presenting to the same group of people over and over again. I would sometimes wonder what the point of it all was since it appeared as though the majority of the chiropractors out in the field did not know what we were doing or why. In a commentary piece by Stuber, Bussi eres and Gotlib¹ they summarized some key messages based on a survey they conducted looking at Chiropractic research capacity in Canada. I feel they are important and should be repeated:

– *Less than 1% of chiropractors in Canada are actively engaged in research.*

* Total Rehab, 250 Bayly Street West, Ajax, Ontario L1S 3V4. Tel: (905) 426-7690. Website: www.totalrehab.net
Lecturer, CMCC
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- *Chiropractic researchers in Canada are substantially under-funded.*
- *Many chiropractic researchers and graduate students are solely self-funded.*
- *Finding new ways to secure funding for chiropractic researchers is imperative.*
- *There is an urgent need to continue to build chiropractic research capacity.*

After all these years, it seemed as though nothing has really changed. I am no longer involved in active research either as I am now involved in full-time practice. Then I attended the World Federation of Chiropractic meeting in Montreal. I was stunned and overwhelmed with joy to see the rooms packed at the research sessions. We must continue to support the small group of people who are out in the trenches of the research world. They are truly dedicated and have such a passion for our profession by doing the work that they are doing. It was wonderful to see practitioners like you and me, acknowledge the work of people like Dr. Mark Erwin, Dr. Greg Kawchuck and Dr. Jay Triano, just to name a few!

Chiropractic is slowly but surely making some inroads into the research world and because of this, into the health care system as a whole. At the Ontario Chiropractic Association (OCA) it is one of our priorities to support chiropractic research and chiropractic researchers. The priority areas of research involvement for the OCA during the fiscal period 2008–2013 are:

1. Research evaluating or demonstrating the value of chiropractic services to patients, payers and other stakeholders.
2. Integration of chiropractic into the health care system through collaborative health services delivery research.
3. Support of chiropractic research chairs / professorships at Canadian universities.
4. Support for the establishment of chiropractic schools in Canadian universities.

The OCA currently provides funding for:

- Dr. Mark Erwin DC, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Surgery, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto

- Dr. John Srbely DC, PhD, Assistant Professor, College of Biological Sciences, Department of Human Health and Nutritional Sciences, University of Guelph
- Dr. Paul Bishop DC, MD, PhD, Head of non-operative care in the Division of Spine, Department of Orthopaedics at Vancouver General Hospital, Clinical Associate Professor of Orthopaedics, Faculty of Medicine, University of British Columbia.

The OCA also has previously funded or is funding research conducted by Drs. Cassidy, Côté, Ammendolia, Stern, van der Velde, Hayden, Mior, Vernon and Kopansky-Giles. We recognise the time and dedication these researchers have put in for the advancement of Chiropractic. It is because of their work that the body of chiropractic research is growing and will continue to do so.

Despite all this great work, there is still a lot more to do. As mentioned previously, only 1% of chiropractors in Canada are conducting research and these researchers are substantially underfunded.¹ We must make the “culture” of research more appealing to more chiropractors by creating more opportunities in the research field. The OCA will continue to support and fund chiropractic research in the years to come. Recently the OCA has also pledged its support to the Canadian Chiropractic Research Foundation (CCRF) by channelling research funds through the CCRF. We are very fortunate that there is an organisation like the CCRF that the OCA can rely upon for the expertise required to assess funding requests and help us allocate the much needed funds.

If you are an OCA member you will be pleased to know that a part of your membership fees are going directly towards supporting chiropractic research. I would urge all of you to continue to support your colleagues out in the “research trenches.” If you are out in the field you can still do your part to help advance chiropractic research. Please support your research organisations such as the CCRF, read the journals, attend the conferences and let’s move chiropractic forward, integrated into our health care system. I know our founding fathers would have expected nothing less from us.

References

- 1 Stuber K, Bussi eres A, Gotlib A. Chiropractic research capacity in Canada in 2008 – Phase 3. *J Can Chiropr Assoc.* 2009; 53(4):227–230.