
Commentary

Chiropractic care and skin health: a partnership for early melanoma detection

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Soins chiropratiques et santé de la peau: un partenariat pour la détection précoce du mélanome

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MOTS CLÉS : chiropratique, détection précoce, collaboration interdisciplinaire, mélanome, cancer de la peau

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Melanoma, a malignant form of skin cancer, contributed about 325,000 new cases and 57,000 deaths worldwide in 2020, with fair-skinned populations having the greatest incidence rates due to UV radiation exposure being a key risk factor.¹ While it accounts for only around 1% of all skin cancers, melanoma accounts for more than 75% of skin cancer-related deaths, with early detection offering a five-year survival rate of more than 99%.²

Chiropractors, as healthcare providers who have frequent physical contact with patients, are particularly positioned to help with the early detection of melanoma.³ Their hands-on approach to patient care allows them to examine and evaluate severe skin conditions during routine examinations, perhaps discovering problematic lesions that might otherwise go undetected.³ Canadians are often without family physicians, which further emphasizes the need for screening from other primary contact providers.⁴ Additionally, due to increasing telehealth visits and limitations on evaluation of skin lesions,⁵ this role is vital because early detection of melanoma results in a much better prognosis than later stages of the disease.³

Chiropractors frequently inspect and manipulate body parts usually hidden by clothing, such as the back, shoulders, and lower extremities.⁶ Routine gowning of patients at initial and follow-up visits is critical for a comprehensive skin inspection, especially in areas frequently covered by clothing, such as the back and lower extremities. This method increases the possibility of discovering worrisome lesions early, while preserving professional standards and respecting patient boundaries through clear communication and consent protocols. These areas are typically neglected during self-examinations and may not be routinely checked by other healthcare providers, making chiropractors ideal allies in melanoma screening.⁶ Furthermore, chiropractors frequently develop long-term connections with their patients, allowing them to track changes in skin appearance over time, which is critical for detecting emerging lesions.^{6,9}

Despite their ability to help with early melanoma identification, many chiropractors may lack professional training in dermatological assessments.³ Implementing targeted instructional programs on skin cancer identification could dramatically improve their ability to detect problematic lesions. Such training should focus on the ABCDE criteria (Asymmetry, Border irregularity, Colour variegation, Diameter >6mm, and Evolution) for melanoma detection

and guidance on adequate documentation and referral processes.^{6,9} Collaboration between chiropractors and dermatologists should help increase melanoma detection rates.⁶ By creating clear referral procedures, chiropractors may ensure that patients with suspicious lesions receive a quick assessment by dermatological specialists.⁷ In Canada, chiropractors are not permitted to refer patients directly to dermatologists. Instead, patients must first visit their primary care physician, who can examine the problem and provide a referral for dermatological examination if necessary.⁴ This interdisciplinary approach helps with early diagnosis and encourages holistic patient care.⁷

Chiropractors can also educate patients on skin cancer prevention and the importance of regular self-examinations.⁶ Chiropractors can assist in raising awareness and fostering proactive practices among their patients by incorporating brief discussions about sun protection and skin health into their patient visits.^{6,9}

It is critical to highlight that while chiropractors can be valuable partners in melanoma identification, their involvement should be viewed as an addition to, not a substitute for, routine dermatological check-ups.⁸ Patients, particularly those at increased risk of skin cancer, should be encouraged to schedule regular skin exams with dermatologists.^{8,9} Implementing a structured plan for skin examination within chiropractic offices may improve the efficacy of this approach.³ A strategy of this nature could involve a brief visual check of exposed skin during initial patient visits and frequent reassessments, with recommendations and referrals to dermatology on an as-needed basis.^{3,6,9}

Given their unique position in patient care, chiropractors have the potential to play an essential role in the early diagnosis of melanoma.^{6,9} Chiropractic professionals can help improve melanoma outcomes by utilizing their frequent patient interactions and enhancing their understanding of skin cancer recognition.³ Future research should focus on developing tailored educational programs and fostering inter-professional collaboration to establish effective screening criteria for chiropractors, enhancing their role in this vital aspect of patient care.

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