



Comprehensive, Conservative Care Model: ChiroFirst Study

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Overview

Chiropractic Care of Minnesota, Inc. (CCMI) is launching a research study, called ChiroFirst, which will evaluate a comprehensive, conservative care pathway for adults with acute and sub-acute low back pain. This pathway places a doctor of chiropractic as the standard point of entry and will utilize ChiroCare Centers of Excellence (CCoE) clinics to collect outcomes data related to the Triple Aim (patient outcomes, patient satisfaction, and cost).

The Current Crisis Regarding Care of Adults with Back Pain

Research indicates that more than 80 percent of adults will experience back or neck pain at some point in their lifetime. This health issue currently ranks as the second most common reason for medical visits, trailing only to upper respiratory infections. Back pain is considered the leading cause of disability worldwide, according to Global burden of Disease 2010. Recently, expenditures on spinal conditions in the United States have increased significantly, despite few positive changes in the overall health of people who experience them. Estimates vary, but it is generally believed that about \$90 billion is spent on the diagnosis and management of low back and neck pain each year in the United States. An additional \$10 to \$20 billion annually is attributed to economic losses in productivity.ⁱ In an effort to quickly alleviate pain and return to everyday activities, many people turn to treatments such as medication and surgery.

The current low back pathway is, indeed, costly and forecasters anticipate health care costs will continue to rise if our systems and processes remain unchanged. In fact, total health care spending in the United States is expected to reach \$4.8 trillion in 2021, up from \$2.6 trillion in 2010 and \$75 billion in 1970. To put it in context, health care spending will account for nearly 20 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), or one-fifth of the U.S. economy by 2021.ⁱⁱ A contributor to the situation, pharmaceutical expenditures related to back and neck pain increased by 188 percent between 1997 and 2005 and costs associated with prescription narcotics rose by a whopping 423 percent.ⁱⁱⁱ

While these numbers are concerning, what is more disturbing is that current treatment protocols for back and neck pain are not working. Researchers from the University of Washington, Seattle, found that the nation's dramatic rise in expenditures for the diagnosis and treatment of back and neck problems has not led to expected improvements in patient health.^{iv} And, because many treatments are not effective, they need to be repeated. On average, health care expenditures for individuals with back pain are estimated to be about 60 percent higher than those without back pain.

Given this situation, it's not hard to believe patient satisfaction is notably low. Not only are patients frustrated with high medical costs, many are reporting unsuccessful treatments and unintended consequences, such as drug addiction. In a study sponsored by CCMI in 2014, one in 10 (10.8 percent) respondents with chronic pain reported having back or neck surgery. And 42.3 percent said it did not fix their pain. Sadly, 65.8 percent of chronic pain sufferers, whether or not they had surgery, said they feel hopeless about ever ridding themselves of their chronic pain.^v

The picture is clear – it is time for a significant change in the care pathway for adults with back pain.

Fortunately, there is a better care option available. Conservative care, although underutilized today, is clinically proven to be a beneficial treatment option for adults with back pain. Conservative care costs considerably less than treatments and often leads to improved patient outcomes and higher patient satisfaction. In fact, CCMI sponsored an outcomes study in 2013 that measured patient functional improvement as a result of chiropractic care. Patients experiencing both acute and chronic pain reported about 44 percent improvement in the first 15 days of chiropractic treatment, with additional improvement in the following 15 days.^{vi}

ChiroCare Centers of Excellence - An Innovative Solution for Back Pain

In 2013, a local leader in primary care, discouraged by the cost, quality, and low satisfaction of back pain resources, approached CCMI for help. Specifically, she asked if CCMI could develop a credentialed network of chiropractors that follow a best practices approach and represent the highest-quality doctors of chiropractic in the Twin Cities area. This valuable conservative care resource would provide her and other practitioners in the industry a trusted conservative care referral tool for their patients with back pain.

CCMI agreed they were the right choice for this initiative. Dr. Vivi-Ann Fischer, chief clinical officer at CCMI, convened a National Task Force on Spine Care comprised of a diverse group of health care professionals including physical therapy, chiropractic, medical doctors, and researchers from across the health care industry. The Task Force's goal was to produce a list of qualities that exemplify a chiropractic "center of excellence," as well desired characteristics of a comprehensive, conservative care pathway for acute and sub-acute low back pain. Dr. Fischer's vision was to fulfill the request by creating a chiropractic network that recognizes clinics who use standardized clinical protocols and an integrated, collaborative approach in achieving positive outcomes and improved quality of life for patients.

After reviewing extensive research over a 16-month period, the Task Force provided CCMI with a disciplined framework of clinical protocols that represent a value-based, patient-centered clinic approach in advancing the treatment of adult low back pain. This framework became the foundation and acceptance criteria for CCMI's ChiroCare Centers of Excellence (CCoE) program.

The CCoE program highlights existing clinics within CCMI's ChiroCare network who maintain well-defined and documented procedures, along with a supporting infrastructure to ensure patients are managed with

consistent care. In December 2014, CCMI launched its CCoE program by inviting select clinics to apply, by invitation only. Through a stringent application process, CCMI evaluated each clinic against the pre-determined criteria and awarded 39 clinics, representing 75 doctors, who meet or exceeded the standards. CCMI anticipates launching the second phase in late 2016. The list of clinics awarded CCoE designation for 2015 can be found on CCMI's CCoE web page.

ChiroFirst Research Study

During the development of the CCoE program, the National Task Force on Spine Care recommended developing and implementing a new care pathway. Through Dr. Fischer's leadership, the team came to an agreement regarding a comprehensive, conservative care model for adult low back pain.

Like any other health care innovation, the next step is to test and validate this new care pathway. CCMI is currently launching a research study, called ChiroFirst, which will evaluate the comprehensive conservative care pathway that places a doctor of chiropractic as the standard point of entry for adults with acute and sub-acute back pain. ChiroFirst will utilize CCoE clinics to collect data in support of the study and will focus on the Triple Aim (cost, outcomes, and patient satisfaction). After successful pilot testing in early 2016, the 12-month study will roll out and capture outcome measures, along with data CCMI currently collects relevant to cost (claims data) and patient satisfaction (Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems – also known as CAPHS).

CCMI has joined forces with MN Community Measurement (MNCM), a pioneer in health care reporting, to facilitate and capture the CCoE clinics' outcomes data. This collaborative partnership will authenticate the validity of ChiroFirst's research findings and offer stepping stones in demonstrating which care treatments yield the best results for patients.

Benefits of a Comprehensive, Conservative Care Pathway

CCMI believes creating a comprehensive, conservative care pathway for acute and sub-acute low back pain will offer a multitude of benefits which may include but are not limited to:

- Patients should experience less confusion and frustration on where to seek appropriate care for their low back pain because physicians and online resources will present beneficial and appropriate options for conservative care.
- Patients who choose chiropractic care as their first line of treatment may avoid chronic pain as a result of early intervention. This may also cause a dramatic reduction in opiate use and associated risks.
- Doctors of chiropractic often encourage active care, education on preventing re-occurrences, and self-care activities for their patients, which may lead to more successful long-term pain management and overall health and wellness benefits.
- CCMI anticipates ChiroFirst's clinical results will show a reduction in redundancies of care since patients will receive appropriate care earlier in the process than before from a doctor who specializes in spine-related disorders. This may lead to a decrease in unnecessary high-tech imaging and ultimately lower health care costs for patients.

- Consumers are driving a new trend toward a preference for conservative care. A recent study sponsored by CCMI validates this changing preference by those being treated for chronic back and neck pain. The CCoE program offers patients a “best-of-the-best” list of doctors of chiropractic who are known for their high-quality, patient-centered care for adults with back pain.
- The CCoE program offers a credentialed and validated network of clinics known for their best practices and patient-centered care. This network is a great tool and resource for Primary Care physicians and other practitioners looking for a reputable and trustworthy conservative care option for their patients with back and neck pain. Also, adopting a collaborative care model will expand professional relationships and improve care management by advancing the treatment of back pain using a value-based, patient-centered clinic approach of comprehensive, conservative care first.

Logistics

CCMI kicked off a three-month ChiroFirst pilot program in 2015 to test the study’s measurement tool for accuracy and efficiency. The measurement will be the average change in functional status within the first 12 weeks of treatment for patients experiencing acute or sub-acute low back pain, using the Oswestry Disability Index 2.1a. Beginning July 1, 2016, CCMI will officially launch its 12-month ChiroFirst study with results expected in the first quarter of 2018. The final report will analyze a conservative care pathway’s ability to deliver quality outcomes, at an affordable price, with high patient satisfaction. CCMI anticipates these results will lead to quality improvements in the outcome measures with acute and sub-acute low back pain.

Going beyond the ChiroFirst study, in order for a collaborative care pathway to be truly successful, the scope of the pathway must be changed. One way to assist this change is through the physician referral process. Practitioners across disciplines should feel comfortable and confident referring their patients with back pain to a conservative care doctor comprehensive, conservative care first, for assessment and possible treatment *before* prescribing medication or referring out for surgery. Ideally, this care pathway would also expand to ensure the same consistency in care for nurse hotlines, walk-in and online clinics, emergency rooms and other patient touch points. A recent study conducted by CCMI indicates consumers seek out friends, family, online support groups and websites, such as WebMD, for insight and support. Ensuring these sources (where applicable) have accurate information about low back pain and conservative care options is also crucial.

Looking Forward

Patients and doctors alike are frustrated with the lack of low back pain resources available today through our current healthcare system. As unsuccessful back surgery rates continue to rise, so does the interest in conservative care options. In order ensure patients are receiving appropriate care at the appropriate time, physicians and doctors across the industry must expand their relationships and collaboration across disciplines and specialties. CCMI believes defining a comprehensive pathway and placing conservative care as the standard point of entry, will improve patient satisfaction and quality outcomes, lower the cost

of care, and spearhead significant change in the way care is delivered for adults with acute and sub-acute low back pain.

About Chiropractic Care of Minnesota, Inc.

Chiropractic Care of Minnesota, Inc. (CCMI) is a nonprofit organization whose goal is to improve the quality of life of our communities by delivering high value healthcare networks and support services. Clarity of mission and vision has led CCMI to develop ChiroCare, the Upper Midwest's largest independent network of chiropractors. CCMI also offers AcuNet, a credentialed network of licensed acupuncturists serving the Upper Midwest. In addition to developing the ChiroCare and AcuNet products, CCMI is responsible for their ongoing management.

About ChiroCare

ChiroCare has become a brand that symbolizes the standard of excellence among chiropractic practices. Since its inception as the nation's first chiropractic network almost 30 years ago, ChiroCare has remained at the forefront of managed chiropractic care. Our select network includes over 2,200 contracted providers throughout the Upper Midwest.

Resources

ⁱ Analyzing Trends in Dollars Spent for Back and Neck Conditions, April 1, 2013, Physician's Weekly, Jon D. Lurie, MD, MS

ⁱⁱ The Facts about Rising Health Care Costs, Aetna, <http://www.aetna.com/health-reform-connection/aetnas-vision/facts-about-costs.html>, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ Deyo, R. Spine, 2002; vol 31.

^{iv} Deyo, R. Spine, 2002; vol 31.

^v *ChiroCare Conservative Care Study*, CCMI, 2014.

^{vi} *Usage of Outcomes Measurements in Chiropractic Care*, CCMI, 2013. <http://chirocare.com/2014/03/study-outcomes-measurements-chiropractic-care/>