

Scope of Practice for Chiropractic Paediatric care

Introduction

The paediatric population is a unique and varied population. It encompasses individuals from birth, through childhood, adolescence and into young adulthood. Brain development and skeletal maturation continues well into the third decade of life. In the context of health care, this requires an understanding of the significant anatomical, physiological and developmental changes that occur through all paediatric ages and stages, and the unique conditions that may only present in this population.

The 12-month global utilisation of chiropractic by the paediatric population (<18 years old) was 8.1%, with 44% attending with musculoskeletal issues¹. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that musculoskeletal complaints in the young are strong predictors of pain in adulthood, while heart disease, obesity and migraine may also have their origins in childhood²⁻⁴. Chiropractors are primary health care providers who are predominately concerned with management of musculoskeletal conditions. They are well positioned to be involved in caring for the paediatric population.

All key stakeholders including parents, health care providers, professional associations and policy makers, desire and will benefit from clarification around the scope and standards of care that are provided by chiropractors involved in the care of the paediatric population.

Governance

Within Australia, Chiropractors are educated in the Australian University system for a minimum of five years, undertaking either a double Bachelor degree or a Bachelor and Masters degree. These university-based courses are accredited by the Council on Chiropractic Education Australasia (CCEA) on behalf of the Chiropractors Board of Australia. Practitioners are registered within Australia by the Australian Health practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and practice under strict standards. One of the core competencies of these programs within Australia is that Chiropractors are capable of primary care contact with patients of all ages.

Postgraduate training in Chiropractic paediatrics varies worldwide; from weekend seminars to Masters level, examination based courses. To date, there is no formal recognition of advanced paediatric training through regulation bodies within Australia. The ACCP established an accreditation committee in 2016, creating a formal regulated process equivalent to other health professional pathways that have been publicly recognised through legislation. Identifying a clear pathway for advanced chiropractic paediatric training will allow regulatory bodies and members of the public to identify practitioners who have sought to advance their skills and knowledge required in paediatric care.

Scope of practice

A scope of practice for chiropractic paediatrics within the chiropractic profession is essential to identify what is acceptable both within the profession, and the role within the wider healthcare community.

Advanced Paediatric Chiropractors have advanced education, clinical training and demonstrated competence to practise clinically beyond the level of a general chiropractor in the paediatric field as detailed in the **Advanced Paediatric Chiropractor Quality Practice Framework** developed by the ACCP.

Chiropractors with **Advanced Paediatric Recognition** should display the following core competencies^{5, 6}:

1. Safety and Consent

- A sound understanding of the risks and benefits associated with providing chiropractic care to the various paediatric age ranges.
- A sound knowledge of the risk factors and presentations associated with child abuse/neglect, as well as reporting requirements.
- Understanding of issues relating to informed consent across the paediatric age ranges, and ability to consider and identify contraindications to paediatric chiropractic care

2. Diagnosis and Examination

- Ability to identify and initiate any necessary diagnostic or examination procedures required including referral for any diagnostic or examination procedures outside the chiropractors' clinical skills to an appropriately qualified health professional in a timely manner.

3. Collaboration

- Ability to work with other health care professionals as part of a team to provide optimum best evidence care for paediatric patients.

4. The Assessment of Growth and Development

Age and stage of development appropriate assessment including neurological development, musculoskeletal development, nutrition, and physical growth recognising the unique paediatric age ranges:

- Neonate (0-8weeks),
- Infant (0-1 years of age),
- Toddler and preschooler (2-5 years),
- School age (5-15 years),
- Adolescent (13-19 years)

5. Chiropractic management of paediatric patients

- Follows the 3 basic principles of:
 - a. Evidence-based practice using clinical reasoning based on the best available evidence,
 - b. The clinicians experience, and
 - c. Patient preferences
- Management of the paediatric patient under chiropractic care, includes management with a chiropractor, co-management with other appropriate health care providers and/or referral to another licensed or certified health care provider or specialist.
- Management of the paediatric patient includes asymptomatic monitoring for health concerns (including spinal and extremity joint dysfunction) with the frequency influenced by, but not limited to, known risk factors, age and stage of development.
- Chiropractic care includes, but is not limited to, spinal and extremity joint manual therapy (adjustment, mobilisation and manipulation), soft tissues therapy, exercise advice, dietary and nutritional advice, sleep hygiene advice, screen use advice, lifestyle advice and advice relating to activity ergonomics.

6. Screening for risk factors and presentations associated with the broader health concerns of each age group.

- For example, but not limited to:
 - i. Overweight and obesity
 - ii. Cafe au lait skin marks associated with Neurofibromatosis
 - iii. Developmental dysplasia of the hip
 - iv. Craniosynostosis
 - v. Eating disorders
 - vi. Infantile failure to thrive
 - vii. Depression and anxiety
 - viii. Scoliosis
- As a primary health care practitioner with advanced clinical knowledge and skills relating to paediatric care ongoing screening for broader health concerns is a core component of chiropractic paediatric care.

References

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