

“Subluxation,” “Chiropractic Subluxation,” “Volkman’s Subluxation” and “Palmer’s Subluxation.”

A Commentary on Style and Usage

The vocabulary of the world’s oldest profession, prostitution, its usage, style, and impact – “broad,” “pro,” “whore” – has been absorbed into the totality of the language of communication, letters, books, poetry and songs of all people everywhere. In contrast, the vocabulary of the world’s youngest profession, chiropractic, its usage, style and impact – “subluxation,” “innate,” “universal intelligence,” “nerve pressure” – remains to be absorbed into the vocabulary of both the English language and the scientific literature.

From meaningful grunts of cave men to the melodic poet’s sonnet, the English language has evolved until today it is said to be the most descriptive and adaptable of any language.

Based in the Latin tradition it has absorbed and adapted words from many other languages. Anyone familiar with the English of Victorian times and that of today knows the refinement of sounds and writing, in addition to the creative expression of its writers, in the development of the English language and its great capacity to record, embellish, dismay and shock the sensitivities of linguists and students of English alike.

English has become the “*lingua franca*” of more than half the world’s population. Yet in over 100 years since chiropractic was born, it has neither officially nor fully absorbed the language and jargon of chiropractic.

Chiropractors use the word “subluxation” in their practices and elsewhere, always with positive emphasis, sometimes with gay abandon, believing that their patients and the general public they both serve and endeavour to influence about the body’s natural healing capacity under chiropractic care, are in need of spinal adjustment.

They might point to an illuminated x-ray picture of the patient’s spine and say: “There lies the subluxation which is the cause or at least contributing to your health problem, and needs fixing! The chiropractor knows what a subluxation is and can do or lead to. And the chiropractor is the only healthcare practitioner specifically trained and expert in the knowledge of finding subluxations and correcting them.

However, this knowledge and expertise is of nought if the patient doesn’t know and understand what the chiropractor is really talking about and the chiropractor doesn’t effectively convey what he or she means in use of that simple but professionally exciting word “subluxation.”

There is often an assumption that the patient knows that subluxation in the chiropractic concept incorporates elements of both mechanical mis-alignment and neurological insult, or nerve pressure as it was once generally described.

There are usually posters on the chiropractor’s wall, or the simple water-hose comparison of reduced water flow by compression in pamphlets illustrating this subluxation

phenomenon. Hence the assumption that the patient knows what the chiropractor is talking about.

But in fact what the patient sees pointed out on the illuminated x-ray picture, is simply a mechanical misalignment in contour or composition. Dramatic as this might be to show a real problem from the chiropractor’s point of view, the patient is only seeing part of the whole, and probably the least important of the entire chiropractic subluxation complex.

What does “subluxation” mean to the average person? If schooled in Latin derivatives, it is automatically understood to be ‘under a luxation’ or something slightly out of joint. If unsure and a dictionary such as Australia’s *The Macquarie* or England’s *Oxford* is consulted, “subluxation” is defined as: ‘a partial dislocation; sprain’ (*Macquarie* p.1719). No mention of neurological insult or ‘nerve pressure’ there. Thus there is conflict in public understanding and potentially between patient and practitioner.

But if the free on-line encyclopedia *Wikipedia* is consulted (Sept 17 2009) a clearer picture becomes evident and the old fashioned medical claim that the chiropractic subluxation simply does not exist is exposed for either the lie it is or the blinkered view of doctors it shows. *Wikipedia* notes that that the UN’s World Health Organization defines both the medical subluxation and the chiropractic subluxation and contrasts the two.

“A subluxation may have different meanings, depending on the medical specialty involved,” it says. It notes that a spinal subluxation can impinge on spinal nerve roots “causing symptoms in the areas served by these roots.” Thus, in the public reference domain, there is clear evidence that the chiropractic subluxation is at last coming into the light of day and is at least partly being recognised for the special entity it is.

To reflect this in dealing day to day with patients, and cement it in the public psyche, I believe chiropractors should deliberately and consistently use the phrase “chiropractic subluxation” despite the vocal relearning process it involves.

Better still, I suggest the phrase “Palmer’s subluxation,” used both in practice and generally, would honour the man from whose knowledge and skills the concept originally arose and identify in history the uniqueness of the chiropractic profession.

If widely used by the chiropractic profession and the general public alike, “Palmer’s subluxation” would lead to its appropriate definition by inclusion in medical dictionaries like “Volkman’s subluxation” is defined under subluxation in Dorlands *The American Illustrated Medical Dictionary* (p.1420) and also into the more widely used dictionaries by the general public such as *The Macquarie Dictionary* and *The Oxford Dictionary*.

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