Are Chiropractors Interested in Participating in Immunization Awareness and Promotion Activities?

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ABSTRACT

Background: Chiropractors have expressed both pro- and anti-vaccination opinions.

Purpose: We explored the interest of Alberta chiropractors in participating in immunization awareness and promoting activities.

Methods: Data were collected in a cross-sectional postal survey (response rate: 78.2%, 503 respondents) in 2002. Participants indicated their interests in a close-ended checklist of seven immunization awareness/promoting activities on 5-point scales. Analyses included frequencies and cross tabulations with demographic characteristics of respondents.

Results: More than 60% expressed at least some interest in participating in one or more activities. The three most popular activities were: call Public Health/doctor/nurses for information to answer questions on immunization (40%); refer parents to Public Health/doctors for information on immunization (39%); and display/give out pamphlets provided by Public Health on vaccines/immunization in office (29%).

Conclusion: Public health practitioners might consider providing chiropractors with contact information for questions on immunization as well as pamphlets on vaccines and immunization for office display.

MeSH terms: Chiropractic; immunization, cross-sectional studies; questionnaires; Canada; complementary therapies

La traduction du résumé se trouve à la fin de l'article.

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Immunization is the most effective and least costly method of preventing vaccine-preventable disease. However, as the incidence of vaccine-preventable diseases declines due to effective immunization programs, public concern about real or perceived vaccine-adverse events has increased.¹ The anti-vaccine movement has caused major disruption of pertussis vaccination programs, resulting in declines in vaccine coverage in several countries, followed by large outbreaks of pertussis disease.² Publicity related to alleged side effects of the MMR vaccine was associated with a decline in vaccine acceptance leading to a number of large measles outbreaks in the UK.³ Chiropractic was the most popular complementary/alternative treatment modality used in the United States in 1997⁴ and in Canada.^{5,6} Although research shows that a proportion of chiropractors advise patients against immunization,^{7,8} some advise patients that they should be immunized,⁸ and others are critical of the anti-vaccinationist sentiment among chiropractors.⁸⁻¹⁰ This suggests the possibility that some chiropractors might be willing to participate in public health immunization awareness/promotion activities. We explored the interest of Alberta chiropractors in participating in immunization awareness and promoting activities.

METHODS

The data presented here were collected as part of a large population-based postal survey of Alberta chiropractors conducted in the summer of 2002. The survey methods have been described elsewhere.^{11,12} Questionnaire items relevant to the present analysis include year and place of graduation from chiropractic college, and responses to a close-ended checklist of seven immunization awareness/promotion activities for which respondent chiropractors were asked to indicate their interest in participation:

- Call Public Health/doctor/nurses for information to answer questions on immunization;
- Display immunization posters from Public Health in own office during Immunization Week;
- Display/give out pamphlets provided by Public Health on vaccines/immunization in office;
- Refer elderly people to doctors or to Public Health to get flu shots;

TABLE I

Frequency with Which Chiropractors Are Interested in Immunization-promoting Activities

Activity	Any Interest n (%)	No Interest n (%)	Neither Interested nor Disinterested n (%)
Call Public Health/doctor/nurses for information to answer questions on immunization (N = 495)	198 (40.0)	194 (39.2)	103 (20.8)
Refer parents to Public Health/doctors for information on immunization (N = 501)	196 (39.1)	202 (40.3)	103 (20.6)
Display/give out pamphlets provided by Public Health on vaccines/immunization in office (N = 498)	145 (29.1)	269 (54.0)	84 (16.9)
Refer parents to Public Health/doctors to have children immunized (N = 501)	114 (22.8)	259 (51.7)	128 (25.5)
Collaborate with Public Health/doctors/nurses to develop strategies to promote immunization (N = 501)	109 (21.8)	286 (57.1)	106 (21.2)
Display immunization posters from Public Health in own office during Immunization Week (N = 500)	92 (18.4)	315 (63.0)	93 (18.6)
Refer elderly people to doctors or to Public Health to get flu shots (N = 502)	93 (18.5)	322 (64.1)	87 (17.3)

TABLE II

Relationship Between Making One or More Comments and Indicating Any Interest in Participating in Specific Activities

Indicated Any Interest in Activity	Made Comment		p-value
	No n (%)	Yes n (%)	
Call Public Health/doctor/nurses for information to answer questions on immunization	184 (41.2)	14 (29.2)	0.145
Display immunization posters from Public Health in own office during Immunization Week	87 (19.2)	5 (10.4)	0.192
Display/give out pamphlets provided by Public Health on vaccines/immunization in office	140 (31.0)	5 (10.9)	0.007
Refer elderly people to doctors or to Public Health to get flu shots	87 (19.2)	6 (12.5)	0.350
Refer parents to Public Health/doctors for information on immunization	180 (39.7)	16 (33.3)	0.478
Refer parents to Public Health/doctors to have children immunized	108 (23.8)	6 (12.5)	0.109
Collaborate with Public Health/doctors/nurses to develop strategies to promote immunization	105 (23.2)	4 (8.3)	0.029

- Refer parents to Public Health/doctors for information on immunization;
- Refer parents to Public Health/doctors to have children immunized;
- Collaborate with Public Health/doctors/nurses to develop strategies to promote immunization.

Each item was scored on a 5-point scale (extremely interested = 4, somewhat interested = 3, neither interested nor disinterested = 2, somewhat disinterested = 1, extremely disinterested = 0). An open-ended item solicited respondents to provide comments. Questionnaires were returned by 503 chiropractors, a response rate of 78.2% for those with a valid mailing address.^{11,12} Data were analyzed using Epi-Info Version 6.04.¹³ Analyses included frequencies, cross tabulations and analyses of variance.¹⁴

RESULTS

Table I displays chiropractors' interest in specific immunization awareness and promoting activities. The highest interest was expressed for calling Public Health/doctors/nurses for answers to questions about immunization (40%); referring parents to the same information sources for information on immunization (39.1%); displaying/giving out pamphlets provided by Public Health on vaccines/immunization in office (29.1%). About 20% had some degree of interest in the activity "collaborate with Public Health/doctors/nurses to develop strategies to promote immunization". Overall, the median number of

activities in which the chiropractors expressed any interest in participating was 1 (range 0-7), and a majority (63.1%) expressed at least some interest in participating in one or more activities.

Comments made by the respondents

Forty-eight respondents made comments in the questionnaire. The thrust of the comments appeared to be that insufficient information on risks/biased information is being provided, and that there is a level of distrust in conventional practitioners. Those who made comments were similar to those who did not with respect to years since graduation and proportion who were graduates of the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College. The median number of activities in which those who made comments expressed any interest in participating was zero, compared to one for those who did not make comments. Table II compares those who did or did not make comments by interest in participating in specific activities. The proportion of those who expressed any interest in participating in each specific awareness/promotion activity was consistently lower for those who made comments than for those who did not.

Correlates of interest in awareness and promotion activities

There was no association between College of graduation and interest in participating in awareness/promotion activities. However, chiropractors who expressed interest in participation in one or more immunization awareness/promotion activities were more

recent graduates from chiropractic college (median 8 years since graduation) than those who had no interest in any activity (median 11 years since graduation; $p=0.006$). When specific activities were examined, this pattern was consistent for four of the seven activities, the exceptions being "Refer elderly people to doctors or to Public Health to get flu shots", "Refer parents to Public Health/doctors to have children immunized" and "Collaborate with Public Health/doctors/nurses to develop strategies to promote immunization". Although the differences were not statistically significant, the median years since graduation for those who had any interest in referring the elderly for flu shots was 11 compared to 9 for those with no interest ($p=0.84$). Similarly, those with any interest in referring parents to have children immunized graduated a median of 10 years ago vs. 9 for those with no interest ($p=0.69$). Finally, the median year of graduation for both those who did vs. those who did not express interest in collaborating to develop strategies to promote immunization was 9 years ($p=0.62$).

DISCUSSION

More than 60% of Alberta chiropractors appear to be open to at least some degree of interaction with conventional practitioners on immunization issues. The greatest degree of interest is in obtaining information on immunization, and neither college of graduation nor years since graduation affected the interests expressed by the chiropractors. About 40% of the chiropractors had some degree of interest in referring parents to

Public Health or to physicians for information on immunization, and a similar proportion expressed some interest in contacting Public Health, a doctor or a nurse for information to answer questions on immunization. The nature of the information that would be of interest to those parents or to the chiropractors themselves is not clear and might not be as simple as information on how to access vaccination or the vaccination schedule. It is possible that the interest might be related to beliefs that there is a need for information to be provided on the risks, rather than the benefits of immunization. Although only a small proportion of the respondents made comments related to participation in immunization awareness/promotion activity items in this study, and those who made the comments were less interested in participating in awareness/promotion activities than those who did not comment, it is notable that the thrust of those comments was to the effect that insufficient information on risks and/or biased information about immunization is being provided. It has been shown elsewhere that nearly 90% of Alberta chiropractors perceive that parents and other members of the public are not adequately informed about the risks of immunization.¹¹ However, to assume that the respondents were only interested in their patients or themselves being provided with risk information in the absence of other data would be inappropriate, as it is known that some chiropractors advise patients that they and/or their children should be immunized^{8,11} and others are very critical of those of their colleagues who take an anti-vaccination stance.^{9,10} Between 20% and 30% of the respondents indicated some interest in displaying posters or handouts from Public Health in their offices. While it is true that this proportion might over-estimate those who would actually take action (intention might not be translated into behaviour), the data suggest that an opportunity exists to build relationships to increase public awareness of the importance of immunization and how vaccination services can be accessed. Public health workers should consider contacting the offices of local chiropractors to identify those who would be interested in displaying posters and leaflets. This might be an important strategy to consider because parents who utilize alternate practitioners (including chiropractors) may be less likely than other parents to have

their children vaccinated.^{15,16} The presentation of such materials in the office of an alternate practitioner might give a message to parents that not all alternate practitioners have an anti-immunization stance.

Approximately one in five chiropractors expressed interest in collaborating with Public Health/doctors/nurses to develop strategies to promote immunization. However, the nature of such collaboration needs to be further elucidated. The comments from the chiropractors suggest that the interest (for some) might be to promote information on the risks of immunization. Although the response rate to this survey was extremely high, it is possible that responders might be more pro-immunization than non-responders,¹¹ and that the true proportions of Alberta chiropractors who are interested in awareness/promotion activities might be lower than the proportions presented here.

Advice from health professionals can have an important influence on decisions to vaccinate.¹⁷ Chiropractors who are willing to participate in awareness/promotion activities might be important allies in increasing vaccine acceptance among parents. Further research to better understand what "collaboration" might mean, and the circumstances under which it might be possible, is indicated.

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RÉSUMÉ

Contexte : Les chiropraticiens expriment des opinions pro- et anti-vaccins.

Objet : Nous avons étudié l'intérêt de chiropraticiens de l'Alberta à participer à des activités de sensibilisation et de promotion de la vaccination.

Méthode : Nous avons mené une enquête postale transversale (taux de réponse de 78,2 %, 503 répondants) en 2002. Les participants ont indiqué leurs intérêts, selon une échelle de 1 à 5, sur une liste fermée de sept activités de sensibilisation ou de promotion de la vaccination. Nous avons analysé la fréquence des réponses et établi des croisements avec le profil démographique des répondants.

Résultats : Plus de 60 % ont exprimé un certain intérêt à participer à une ou plusieurs activités. Les trois activités les plus populaires étaient les suivantes : demander par téléphone des renseignements sur la vaccination aux services de santé publique, aux médecins ou aux infirmières (40 %); aiguiller les parents vers des services de santé publique ou des médecins pour obtenir des renseignements sur la vaccination (39 %); et afficher ou distribuer dans leur cabinet des dépliants sur les vaccins ou sur la vaccination fournis par les services de santé publique (29 %).

Conclusion : Les praticiens de la santé publique devraient songer à fournir aux chiropraticiens les coordonnées d'intervenants pouvant répondre aux questions sur la vaccination, ainsi que des dépliants sur les vaccins et la vaccination pour leurs présentoirs.