**Chiropractors Amongst the Sea: Are We Needed?**by Anneka Parks, D.C. and Brent Hayes, D.C.

Earlier this year, my husband, Brent, and I took a cruise to Alaska to gauge the need for chiropractic services for the crew members and the guests on these magnificent vessels. This was not an overnight process, and we knew it was going to take some brain power. In our research, we found numerous internet queries asking if chiropractors were aboard ships prior to a cruise adventure, and if chiropractors were available at specific ports of call, so, we thought, maybe there is truly a demand.

We decided that in order for us to hit this experience head-on, we needed to send out a letter of intent to each cruise liner with a pre-paid postcard survey to extend our search for our services. We sent 38 letters to American and foreign cruise liners and received responses from four companies, including one in Germany for which we are still searching for a translator.

All surveys were anonymous except for the one from Germany. The survey was intended to learn whether chiropractic is part of the company’s wellness program for its employees and to see if they currently offer chiropractic services for their guests. All surveys came back with a response of “NO” to all questions. One important question, “Do you know what chiropractic is?” was sadly answered “NO.” We were bound and determined to let our specific cruise know and experience the feel of chiropractic.

We chose Alaska for its mature guests who, we hoped, had experience with chiropractic. We chose the specific cruise line for its array of natural health amenities on board, including acupuncture, and for its reasonably priced cruise fares. After we chose our destination and cruise line, we dove in for an adventure and an experience of a lifetime.

While aboard the cruise ship, we became educated about its crew members and their work schedules. There were 997 crew members aboard the ship all who had specific duties; each worked approximately 10 hours a day, 7 days a week. The crew members are aboard the ship for a contract length of anywhere between 4-9 months, and many are on the same ship for a full 9 months.

Many crew members with whom we spoke get an average of 5-6 hours of sleep each night, with no opportunity to “sleep in” and no weekends to spare. Crew members hailed from all over the world: Romania, Ukraine, Columbia, Russia, India, Indonesia, Paraguay, South Africa, Croatia, etc. It became clear that very few crew members knew what chiropractic was. Our goal: educate those we can.

Throughout our trip we had many opportunities to speak with members of the crew. Two examples that stand out the strongest were as follows:

A male steward named Ajit\* from India had been on the ship for two weeks and has had severe low back pain since week one. He has seen the on-board medical facility for his condition and told us that “all they do for me is pain pills and are now recommending pain shots.” Ajit would be ending his work contract very early to return to India due to the severity of his lower back pain. He explained that he wears a lower back brace/belt to help control his pain, for he “does not want to get the shots.”

A female from India works in housekeeping and cleaning. She was in the dining hall bathroom bent over in what appeared to be pain. I asked her if she was okay and she responded, “No, I am in so much pain… my neck hurts [as she is grabbing her neck and trying to rotate side to side] and my low back [as she is rubbing lumbar spine] hurts.”

Before I explained that I am a chiropractor, I asked her, “What do you do when you have pain like this?” She replied that she uses pain medication “like Tylenol” and takes “warm hot showers.” When I asked her if she was familiar with chiropractic, she smiled and said “yes.” She wished she was home so she could see her chiropractor.

 I finally told her I was a chiropractor and gave her some pointers she to use when she started to have pain. I also showed her multiple therapeutic exercises to stretch her muscles that were tight and strengthen those muscles that are weak. I recommended ice for her pain at night for inflammation. After about 20 minutes on the floor, this young lady returned to work with a smile on her face, and as the week went on, she couldn’t thank us enough for friendly advice!

As the week went on, we experienced many opportunities to discuss chiropractic with people, and most of the time, when we weren’t expecting them. God opened many doors for us to educate and help those in need.

The ship offered three free health seminars on pain, arthritis and acupuncture. We attended these seminars and found them to be very informative, but the one that stood out the most to us was the program on pain and acupuncture. The acupuncturist did not know who we were, because we wanted to keep our identity as doctors hidden so we could see the true aspects of everything. The first thing he recommended was that everyone sitting in his seminar to find a chiropractor when they got home.

Wow – amazing! So, we thought, why aren’t there any on-board?

We were truly impressed that this acupuncturist from Australia had such a strong referral for chiropractors. We learned so much about the effectiveness of acupuncture and how acupuncture and chiropractic complement one another.

Later in the seminar, one older lady became frustrated and said “out of all the amenities this ship has to offer, all I wanted was a chiropractor.” Still not ready to share our identity as chiropractors, deep inside we were overwhelmed with joy that someone wanted what we could provide.

On the second to last day of our trip, the biggest conversation was going to take place with the medical facility and the chief medical physician, Dr. Zuma. He was contracted aboard this specific ship for 9 months and then would take about 2 months off before heading out on another cruise liner.

We announced ourselves and our intent before meeting with Dr. Zuma, and he warmly welcomed us into his medical facility. The facility looked much like a miniature hospital with 3 operatory rooms, a portable x-ray unit, and an on-boat pharmacy (medical doctor use only). We did not waste much time but got right down to it, asking, “Do you think there is a need for chiropractors and their services?”

He looked at us, hands folded and leaning back in the chair, and said sternly “Yes, I do, but good luck with corporate.” We asked what he meant.

 “Corporate is cheap,” he explained. “I haven’t had a raise in 3 years, and they keep cutting out my pharmaceutical medical supply, so how am I going to treat patients if I don’t have the things I need?”

We talked with him about the history of negative interactions between chiropractic doctors and medical doctors, and he said it plainly and clearly:

“We all need to stop being ignorant of one another. It’s ignorance that separates our professions, and ALL doctors of ALL kinds have a specific job and are needed. Our concern should be only about the patient and their well-being, not about who’s smarter or more educated.”

We gained great perspective and knowledge about the cruise ship industry, crew members and customers, and we also found the answer to our own key question: “Is there a need for chiropractic services on cruise ships?”

We would both say absolutely yes. Not only did we feel the need from the crew, we also felt the need from cruise guests and its medical staff.

The attending physician stated many times that spinal misalignments do happen, and patients come see him for help. He said he had completed some training back home with a chiropractor in order to help his crew members when spinal subluxations occur, although he felt a specific chiropractic adjustment would be more beneficial. He also explained that licensing was questionable when it came to open water laws, for he believes that open water is the last of neutral territory among professionals.

Dr. Zuma thought the only thing that could stop chiropractors from being aboard cruise ships had to do with compensation, and he felt that many corporations need to be educated about the benefits of chiropractic care.

So to all the young and future chiropractors: Get out there and educate all you can. Start being a chiropractic evangelist. We are positive the first chiropractor aboard one of these magnificent vessels would be extremely busy, and they are all in need of our kind of care.

We thank Sherman College for training us thoroughly, and we hope to see a Sherman graduate as the first chiropractic crew member to step on one of these wonderful ships.

*\*Note: names have been changed to protect participating parties. Please note this is an informative article only.*