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ACA CHIROPRACTORS  Hands down better™

Sept. 27, 2017

Marilyn Tavenner
President and CEO
America's Health Insurance Plans
601 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
South Building Suite 500 Washington, DC 20004

Dear Ms. Tavenner,

The American Chiropractic Association (ACA) is encouraged to hear that 37 U.S. attorneys general sent a letter to you regarding the need to reduce any financial incentives to doctors who prescribe opioids and instead expand coverage for alternative non-drug therapies for pain management. The chiropractic profession has a special interest in the opioid epidemic as low-back pain remains one of the most common reasons for which primary care doctors prescribe these powerful drugs. At the same time, research has demonstrated that opioids are essentially ineffective for chronic low-back pain.

ACA believes that a multi-faceted approach is needed to fight the opioid epidemic -- one that includes physician/provider training and improving access to treatment and prevention. Patients across the country would benefit tremendously if health care professionals could work more collaboratively to identify individuals who could benefit from conservative forms of care for pain before resorting to higher risk options such as opioids. ACA chiropractors stand ready to be a part of the team working toward such a solution.

Conservative management of low-back pain by chiropractors may include trying spinal manipulation combined with exercise and stretching prior to moving on to procedures involving higher risk. In addition, many other active self-care and complementary and integrative strategies that may provide viable solutions for chronic pain sufferers (massage, acupuncture, etc.) can be accessed through a chiropractor.

As you are aware, the American College of Physicians (ACP) updated its low-back pain treatment guidelines this year to support a conservative approach to care. The ACP guidelines cite heat therapy, massage, acupuncture and spinal manipulation (a centerpiece of chiropractic care) as options for non-invasive, non-drug therapies for low back pain. Only when such treatments provide little or no relief, the guidelines state, should patients move on to medicines such as ibuprofen or muscle relaxants, which research indicates have limited pain-relief effects. According to the guidelines, prescription opioids should be a last resort for those suffering from low back pain, as the risk of addiction and overdose may outweigh the benefits.

Because of their drug-free approach to pain management, chiropractors can serve as an important first line of defense in the prescription painkiller epidemic. According to a poll by Gallup, more than 33 million Americans sought chiropractic services in 2014. The same poll showed that a majority of U.S. adults believe chiropractors are effective at treating neck and back pain, and more than a quarter of them would choose chiropractic care first for treatment.

As the largest professional association in the U.S. representing chiropractors, ACA stands ready to assist AHIP in any way to explore the ideas suggested by the attorneys general further. Please contact John Falardeau at jfalardeau@acatoday.org or (703) 812-0214 if we can be of service.

With regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'David A. Herd, DC'.

David Herd, DC
President
American Chiropractic Association