

# Chapter 7

## The Chiropractic Practitioner

The first section of the 2014 Survey of Chiropractic Practice inquired about the responding chiropractic practitioner. Survey data were reported only from licensed doctors of chiropractic who indicated they were practicing 20 or more hours per week. Therefore, those chiropractors who received the survey and were not currently practicing chiropractic (either retired or working as researchers and/or educators) were asked to return the survey without completing it. Over ten percent (10.7%) of the surveys returned indicated that the respondent was not currently in practice. The next question asked practitioners to report the hours per week they spend in patient care practice. Data from those who marked 9 or fewer (3.0%) and 10-19 hours (7.1%) were not included in this report as they were considered to be in part-time practice.

According to the results of the 2014 survey, nearly half (44.7%) of full-time chiropractors work 30-39 hours per week, while one-quarter (23.4%) work 40-49 hours per week (Figure 7.1). These proportions are essentially the same as they were in 2009. Since this question was first asked in 1991, the proportion working 20-29 hours per week has increased significantly, from 11.2% to 25.8%.

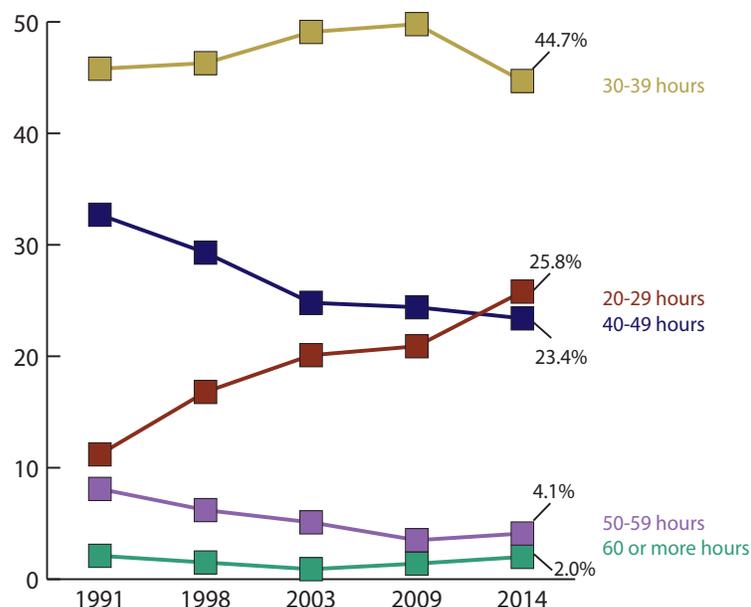


Figure 7.1 Hours Worked Per Week

## Personal Demographics

In the *Demographic Data* section of the survey, respondents answered questions concerning personal characteristics such as gender and ethnicity.

### Gender

- According to the 2014 survey data, 72.9% of chiropractic practitioners are male and 27.1% are female. In comparison to the NBCE 1991 survey, the percentage of female chiropractors has essentially doubled (Figure 7.2).

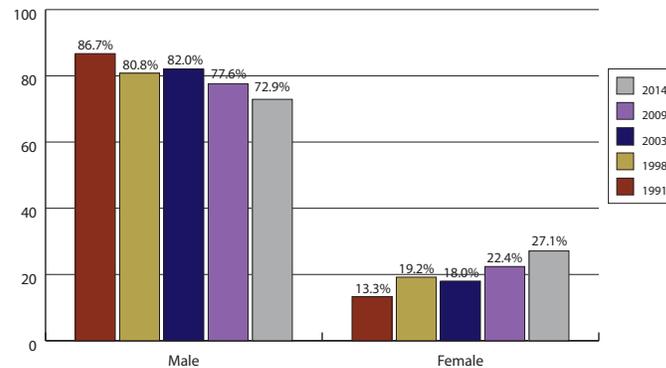


Figure 7.2 Practitioner Gender

### Ethnic Origin

- When inquiring into practitioner ethnicity, the 2014 survey allowed respondents to mark all categories that applied and also to write in an additional ethnic origin. This survey found that 89.4% of respondents chose White as a single ethnic origin. This continues a generally downward trend since 1991.
- Multi-Ethnic, Asian, Hispanic, African American, Native American, and other ethnicities comprise the remaining 10.6% (Table 7.1).

Ethnic Origin	1991	1998	2003	2009	2014
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.8%	1.8%	2.7%	2.6%	2.8%
Black or African American	0.5%	0.6%	0.8%	0.9%	1.2%
White	95.5%	93.5%	91.5%	84.9%	89.4%
Hispanic	1.6%	1.7%	2.2%	1.0%	2.0%
Native American	0.2%	0.8%	0.6%	0.4%	0.3%
Other	1.2%	1.6%	1.5%	1.2%	0.2%
Multi-Ethnic	—	—	0.7%	9.0%	4.1%

Table 7.1 Ethnic Origin

### Level of Non-Chiropractic Education

The *Demographic Data* section also asked participants to indicate the highest level of non-chiropractic education they have attained. The level of pre-chiropractic education has steadily risen since 1991, revealed in the increased number of chiropractors with bachelor's degrees as shown in Figure 7.3.

- Ninety-five (94.6%) percent of chiropractors hold a post-secondary academic degree in addition to doctor of chiropractic.
- Almost two-thirds (65.9%) of chiropractic practitioners have bachelor's degrees, 5.9% have master's degrees, and 7.0% have doctorates in non-chiropractic fields.
- Compared to the 1991 survey data, the proportion of chiropractors with bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees has increased.

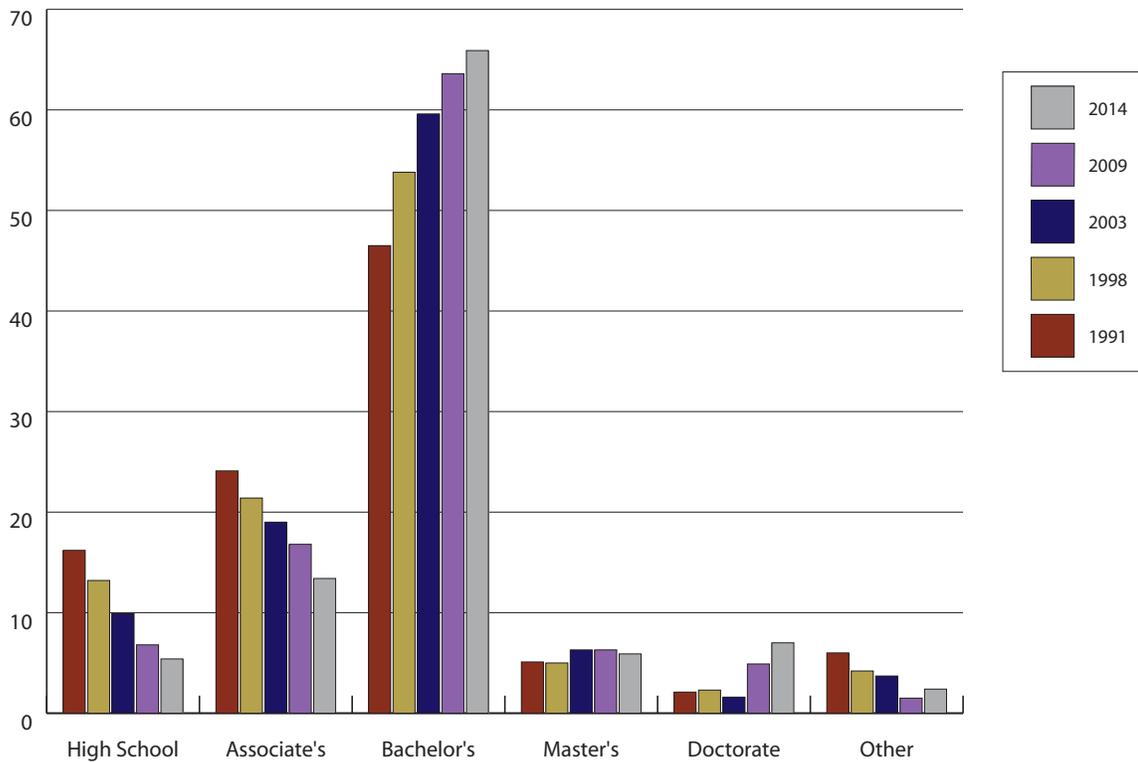


Figure 7.3 Non-chiropractic Education

### Post-Graduate Diplomate Status

Regarding specialty training and board certification, respondents were asked to indicate if they hold post-graduate diplomate status through a specialty board, council, academy, college, or association.

- Of the survey respondents, 16.4% have attained diplomate status or the equivalent, 18.0% indicated that they have worked toward diplomate status, and the remaining 65.6% have no diplomate status or equivalent specialty certification (Table 7.2).

Status	Percentage
None / NA	65.6%
Worked toward	18.0%
Completed	16.4%

**Table 7.2 Post-graduate Diplomate Status**

### Chiropractic Colleges Represented

Respondents were asked to indicate the college from which they received their Doctor of Chiropractic degree. Approximately one-fourth (24.0%) of respondents received their chiropractic degree from one of the three Palmer colleges and 12.9% received their Doctor of Chiropractic degree from one of the two Life colleges. Nine percent (9.6%) of the respondents indicated that National was the college from which they graduated. Only those institutions with at least one respondent are listed. Since 1991, new colleges have been added to this list<sup>1</sup> (Table 7.3).

College	1991	1998	2003	2009	2014
Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College Toronto, Ontario, Canada	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Cleveland Chiropractic College, Kansas City Overland Park, Kansas	3.9%	3.5%	4.3%	4.1%	4.8%
Cleveland Chiropractic College, Los Angeles Los Angeles, California	3.5%	2.9%	1.8%	1.2%	2.8%
Life Chiropractic College West Hayward, California	1.3%	2.6%	3.7%	3.6%	2.7%
Life University, School of Chiropractic Marietta, Georgia	9.0%	12.3%	11.1%	11.7%	10.2%
Lincoln College of Chiropractic Indianapolis, Indiana	No data	0.6%	0.9%	0.5%	0.1%

**Table 7.3 Chiropractic Colleges Represented**

<sup>1</sup> “No data” in place of a value for particular institutions in Table 7.3 denotes data were not obtained for that institution at the time of the survey. “N/A” denotes the program had not conferred the D.C. degree when data were obtained.

College	1991	1998	2003	2009	2014
Logan College of Chiropractic Chesterfield, Missouri	8.0%	8.4%	7.7%	9.4%	6.9%
National University of Health Sciences Lombard, Illinois	11.6%	9.2%	10.4%	7.6%	9.6%
New York Chiropractic College Seneca Falls, New York	7.4%	7.3%	6.7%	7.9%	6.8%
Northwestern Health Sciences University Bloomington, Minnesota	4.5%	4.5%	5.9%	5.5%	5.9%
Palmer College of Chiropractic, Davenport Campus Davenport, Iowa	27.7%	22.3%	21.3%	21.6%	20.2%
Palmer College of Chiropractic, Florida Campus Port Orange, Florida	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.5%	0.6%
Palmer College of Chiropractic, West Campus San Jose, California	2.2%	3.7%	3.5%	4.5%	3.2%
Parker College of Chiropractic Dallas, Texas	0.7%	3.1%	4.3%	6.4%	4.4%
Pennsylvania College of Chiropractic Horsham, Pennsylvania	0.8%	0.7%	0.4%	0.1%	0.7%
Quantum University Pasadena, California	No data	No data	No data	No data	1.3%
Sherman College of Chiropractic Spartanburg, South Carolina	2.9%	1.7%	2.4%	2.3%	3.6%
Southern California University of Health Sciences Whittier, California	6.6%	7.5%	7.2%	4.7%	5.8%
Texas Chiropractic College Pasadena, Texas	3.5%	4.3%	3.4%	3.5%	5.1%
University of Bridgeport, College of Chiropractic Bridgeport, Connecticut	N/A	0.2%	0.5%	0.6%	0.4%
University of Western States Portland, Oregon	3.2%	3.7%	3.0%	3.9%	4.5%
Other	2.8%	0.5%	1.0%	0.1%	0.1%

Table 7.3 Chiropractic Colleges Represented, continued

## The Chiropractic Work Environment

The *Work Environment* section of the 2014 survey investigated several current areas regarding the nature of chiropractic practice. This section inquired about hospital staff privileges and treatment of military personnel, community size of the practice location, number of patients seen weekly, and the use of radiography.

### Hospital and Military Practice

- A small portion (3.6%) of practicing chiropractors reported that they hold staff privileges at a hospital. This group had been growing steadily since 1991 – with 4.9% in 1991, 5.2% in 1998, 6.0% in 2003, and 6.9% in 2009 – but the percent was lower in the 2014 survey.
- Another small percent (6.7%) is currently employed under contract to provide chiropractic care to active or retired military personnel. This group has grown by 50% since the question was first asked in 2009.

### Practice Location by Community Size and Use of Radiography

- Thirty-four percent (34.1%) of chiropractors reported that their office is located in a city, 31.0% practice in a suburb, and 19.1% practice in a small town.
- Only 14.6% of respondents described their practice location as a rural small town or a rural area.
- About fifty percent (50.1%) of chiropractic practitioners take radiographs in their offices; almost one third of these (14.1%) use digital imaging equipment.

### Patient Workload, Gender, and Ages

- A large majority (72.6%) of chiropractors report that they treat up to 99 individual patients in a week: 36.7% treat 50 to 99 patients, and 35.9% treat fewer than 50 patients. A smaller proportion (27.4%) see 100 or more individual patients weekly: 17.4% treat 100 to 149 patients, and 10.0% reported that they personally see more than 150 individual patients in a week (Table 7.4).

Patients per Week	2009	2014
Fewer than 50	31.7%	35.9%
50 - 99	38.8%	36.7%
100 - 149	18.1%	17.4%
150 - 199	6.6%	5.6%
200 - 249	2.8%	3.0%
More than 250	2.0%	1.4%

Table 7.4 Number of Patients Per Week

- Responding chiropractors estimated that females account for 59.0% of their patients. This distribution has been essentially unchanged since the 1991 NBCE Survey of Chiropractic Practice.
- Data from the current survey indicate that the percentage of patients under 18 years of age has increased since the 1991 survey but is about the same as in 1998, 2003, and 2009 (9.7% in 1991, 16.3% in 1998, 18.2% in 2003, 17.1% in 2009, and 17.4% in 2014). The current survey, like the 1998, 2003, and 2009 surveys, asked respondents to differentiate between the percentage of youngsters in their practice who were 5 years of age and under (7.8%) and those who were between 6 and 17 years old (9.6%).
- The rank order of patient age categories has remained about the same over the past 23 years. The highest percentage of patients is still in the 31-50-year range (28.5%), followed by 51-64-year-olds (22.7%). The last three age categories have alternated in highest frequency (Figure 7.4).

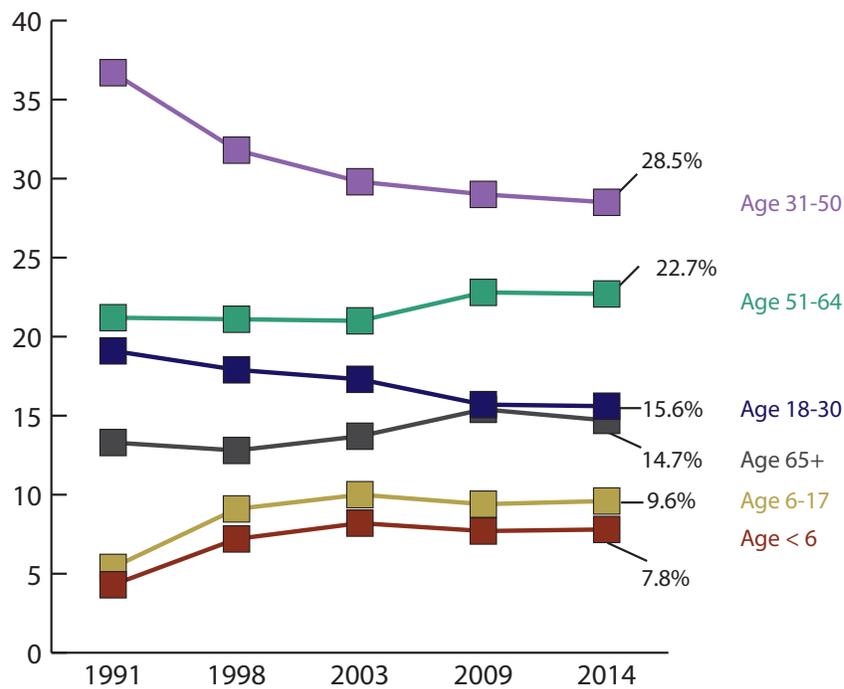


Figure 7.4 Percent of Patients by Age

### Interprofessional Referrals

The 2009 survey asked participants to specify the frequency with which they received patient referrals from other health professionals and/or made patient referrals to other health professionals in the past year. Questions regarding interprofessional referrals were not included in the 2014 survey. Since nearly all respondents (99.3%) indicated they had made referrals to other health professionals and 98.3% reported receiving referrals of patients from other health professionals in 2009, those important data are re-reported here (Figure 7.5).

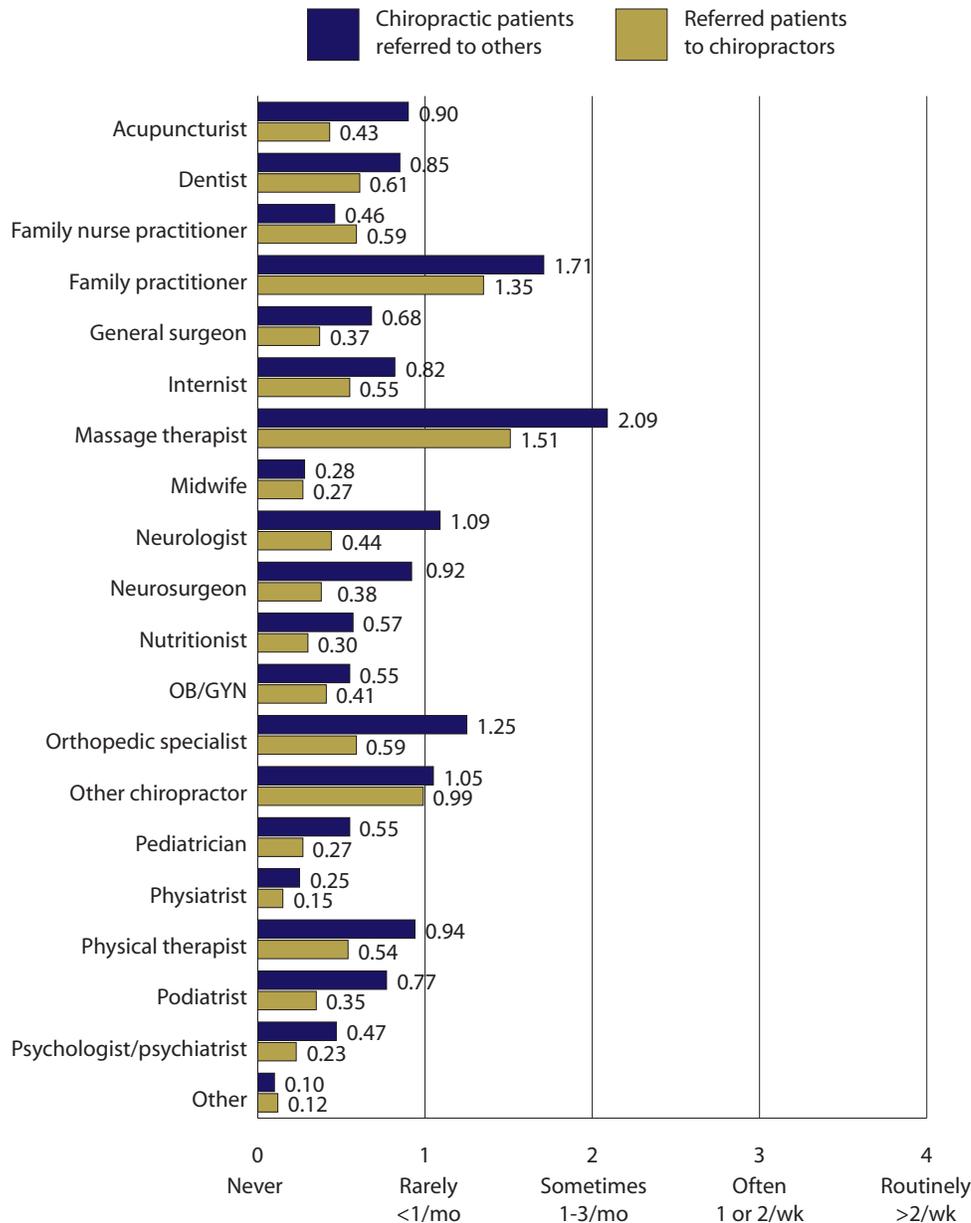


Figure 7.5 Frequency of Patient Referrals (2009)

## Experience and Orientation

The 2014 survey addressed length of time in practice, components of chiropractic practice, and practice setting and work role.

### Years in Practice

The trend over the past 18 years has continued, with the portion of practitioners in practice more than 25 years increasing to 38.3% in 2014. As in 2009, a small portion of respondents have been in practice fewer than five years (10.6% in 2009 and 9.5% in 2014), and more than half have practiced for more than 15 years\* (51.1% in 2009 and 63.8% in 2014) (Table 7.5).

Years in Practice	1991	1998	2003	2009	2014
Fewer than 2 years	4.1%	7.0%	1.9%	2.2%	1.7%
2-4 years	14.2%	11.3%	8.3%	8.4%	7.8%
5-15 years	57.1%	46.6%	42.4%	38.3%	26.7%
16-25 years	24.6%	25.2%	32.1%	26.4%	25.5%
More than 25 years		9.9%	15.4%	24.7%	38.3%

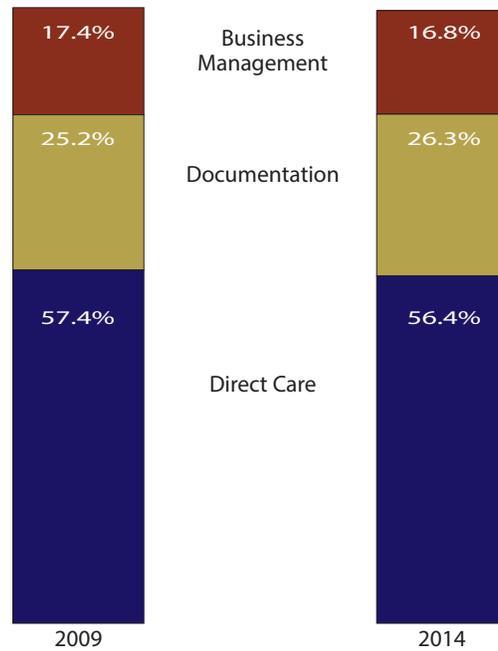
Table 7.5 Years in Practice

\* These findings are discussed further in Chapter 6.

### Components of Chiropractic Practice

The 2014 NBCE survey also addressed the time committed to various functions associated with a chiropractic office. Time spent in direct patient care and education, documentation of care, and business management including marketing were rated in 2009 and 2014.

According to respondents, a typical chiropractor now spends a quarter (26.3%) of occupational time documenting the care provided; this category has increased substantially since the question was asked in 1998 (13.8%) and 2003 (13.2%). Chiropractors now spend 56.4% of their practice time performing direct patient care and education and 16.8% with business management and marketing duties.



**Figure 7.6 Components of Chiropractic Practice**

**Practice Setting and Work Role**

According to the results of the 2014 survey, 90.8% of the respondents work in a chiropractic office, while 7.8% work in an integrated health care facility (Table 7.6).

Setting	Percentage
Chiropractic office	90.8%
Integrated health care facility	7.8%
Spinal surgical center	0.1%
Community health center	0.1%
Other	1.2%

**Table 7.6 Practice Setting**

Nearly three-fourths (74.7%) reported they are sole proprietors, while 13.5% reported being an associate or employee. Eight percent (8.3%) reported that they are in a business partnership (Table 7.7).

Role	Percentage
Sole proprietor	74.7%
Partner	8.3%
Associate/Employee	13.5%
Other	3.4%

**Table 7.7 Role in Practice Setting**

### Survey Concerning Chiropractic Assistants

The 2009 survey included several questions regarding the duties and certification or licensing of chiropractic assistants. These questions were not asked in the 2014 survey; therefore, the 2009 unweighted data are reported here.

By responding to one or more of the questions in this section, the majority (55.4%) of chiropractic practitioners indicated that they currently employ one or more chiropractic assistants to perform direct patient contact duties in their offices. This finding is consistent with the previous NBCE surveys, which contained a more limited question regarding the use of chiropractic assistants. When asked about their practice work environment, 41.1% of the respondents to the NBCE survey in 1998 and 41.5% in 2003 reported that they were delegating the application of adjunctive therapies to a chiropractic assistant.

Interestingly, while 44.1% of the respondents reported that their state requires some form of certification or licensure for non-chiropractors to perform patient contact duties in a chiropractic office, respondents also reported that certified or licensed chiropractic assistants are employed full-time in only 28.8% of their offices. This apparent disparity may be explained as follows: It is possible that many respondents who live in states requiring certification or licensure of chiropractic assistants do not employ these professionals to perform patient contact duties. One-quarter (25.5%) of chiropractors employ one or more licensed or certified massage therapists.

Practitioners who employ chiropractic assistants reported that they most commonly apply ice packs, electrical stimulation, hot packs, and ultrasound therapy to patients; they also frequently obtain patients' vital signs (Table 7.8).

Duty	Percent who Perform
Apply ice packs/cryotherapy	71.5%
Apply electrical stimulation/therapy	64.9%
Apply hot packs/moist heat	56.2%
Apply ultrasound therapy	50.8%
Obtain vital signs	45.2%
Perform massage treatments	37.6%
Teach and/or supervise exercises	36.8%
Apply mechanically assisted traction/decompression	35.5%
Take x-rays	22.8%
Apply vibratory therapy	20.0%
Perform postural assessments	18.8%
Apply cold laser treatment	16.3%
Apply infrared, heat lamp, or heating pad	13.8%
Perform urine dipstick analysis	10.6%
Perform orthopedic/neurological examinations	10.4%
Perform thermography/EMG scans	10.0%
Apply direct current or iontophoresis	8.6%
Apply diathermy (shortwave or microwave)	8.4%
Apply whirlpool or hydrotherapy	6.4%
Apply paraffin baths	5.3%
Draw blood for testing	2.7%

**Table 7.8 Duties of Chiropractic Assistants Who Provide Patient Care**