

# **The Embryology of D.D. Palmer's Chiropractic Metaphors and Hypotheses\***

**A Presentation to the International Conference on Spinal  
Manipulation  
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## **Association for the History of Chiropractic**

741 Brady Street, Davenport IA 52803 USA

"The 'basic principles' of Chiropractic were in that first adjustment; it was the embryo for three months; then the fetal growth; when born I had the pleasure of naming the boy Chiropractic" (D.D. Palmer, 1910, p. 539).

### **S u m m a r y**

Chiropractors have gained some credibility in recent years as providers of quality health care services for patients with disorders of the musculoskeletal system. However, the chiropractic profession has long been and continues to be ridiculed for advocating the broader clinical utility of manipulative procedures, for example, for patients with cancer, diseases of the viscera, cardiovascular disorders and psychiatric conditions. The persistence of these broader claims despite the absence of scientific evidence is partly attributable to dogmatic adherence to rigid, unchanging, and largely unchallenged theories of disease causation (e.g., subluxation) and intervention. Indeed, some chiropractors take pride in the supposedly unchanging character of chiropractic paradigms.

Contrary to the notion that chiropractic theories and methods were fixed in 1895 by the founder, D.D. Palmer, a good deal of theoretical evolution was not completed until 1904. The earliest available literature published by D.D. Palmer (1896-1902) has long been hidden from the profession, but is now available through the efforts of archivists at Palmer College in Davenport, Iowa. These early publications hint at how Old Dad Chiro's first theory of chiropractic emerged from his magnetic healing practices, and reveal that Palmer's first theory of chiropractic was as broad as, although not synonymous with, the osteopathic theories of A.T. Still. The founder of chiropractic was initially quite concerned with relieving circulatory obstructions, which, like the osseo-neural lesions later known as chiropractic subluxations, were thought to produce friction and inflammation.

Despite the vital-magnetic background which led him to chiropractic, Palmer's first theory of chiropractic offered mechanical rather than spiritual metaphors; the human was construed as a machine that would operate smoothly, without friction, if all parts were in their proper place. Not until 1904 do distinctions between "innate" vs. "educated" nerves appear in his publications, and not until 1906 does "innate" become a distinct personality, *Innate Intelligence*. Old Dad Chiro may not have equated Innate Intelligence with Universal Intelligence (God) until after his conviction and incarceration in Scott County Jail in 1906. Eventually, his religious platform was offered to provide legal protection to chiropractors under the religious exemption clauses in many medical practice acts.

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\*Preparation of this report was supported by funds from the Palmer College of Chiropractic/West and the National Institute of Chiropractic Research

Further conceptual development continued until Palmer's death in October, 1913, and is reflected in his 1910 volume, *The Chiropractor's Adjuster* and his posthumously published *The Chiropractor* (1914). Palmer's later writings conflict rather sharply in some respects with his seminal chiropractic ideas and with those of many of his rivals (such as A.P. Davis, MD, DO, DC, ND, B.J. Palmer, DC, Solon Massey Langworthy, DC and Oakley G. Smith, DC, DN). Palmer argued strenuously that nerves are not "pinched" in the intervertebral foramina and that the foramina became widened (rather than narrowed or obstructed) when the articular surfaces of vertebra were misaligned. His later ideas about "nerve interference" posited that pressure on a nerve (rather than pinching) caused an increase in the tension of the nerve, which in turn altered the vibrational frequency of neural transmission. An accelerated rate of nerve impulses (rather than a restriction of nerve flow) was believed to cause excessive heat in the nerve and in the end-organs served by the affected nerve. For D.D. Palmer this increased heat was manifest as inflammation and tissue necrosis. Palmer also allowed that subluxation might decrease tension in nerves, with the end result of inadequate neural transmission producing hard tumors. The founder believed that inflammation had no beneficial effects and was always deleterious; more than anything else his second theory of chiropractic is a theory of inflammation.

This review attempts to illustrate and chronologically organize some of this theoretical metamorphosis, and suggests that an understanding of how early chiropractic thought evolved is relevant to the chiropractic profession today. Available for inspection at the lecture will be photoreductions of Palmer's advertisements from before the turn of the century and many of his subsequent writings.

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## **Association for the History of Chiropractic**

741 Brady Street, Davenport IA 52803 USA  
Alana Ferguson, M.S., Executive Director

The AHC is a non-profit membership organization committed to exploring and preserving the rich heritage of the chiropractic profession. In addition to its annual Conference on the History of Chiropractic, the AHC publishes *Chiropractic History*, a scholarly, periodical which is indexed by the National Library of Medicine's *Bibliography of the History of Medicine* and the Chiropractic Library Consortium's *Index to the Chiropractic Literature*. Membership dues (\$35/year for doctors, \$17/year for students) includes a subscription to *Chiropractic History* and the AHC's quarterly *Newsletter*, and entitles the member to voting privileges in the organization.

The AHC was founded at Spears Chiropractic Hospital in Colorado in 1980. The first AHC Conference on the History of Chiropractic was held at the Smithsonian Institute in

Washington, D.C. in 1981. Each year since the AHC Conference has been held at a different chiropractic college. The organization welcomes the participation of chiropractors and friends of all persuasions and philosophies.

# CANCERS: THEIR CAUSE AND CURE\*

Page after page has been written upon this horrible disease. They are described fully, but as to their cause and cure, these writers leave us in the dark. During the nine years of our treatment of diseases, we have given the study of this dreaded disease special attention. We think that we have at last fully arrived at the cause, and knowing the cause, we are able to relieve and cure any case of cancer where the sufferer has enough time and vitality left to take the treatment.

An eminent English writer comes very near the truth when he suggests that "the beginnings of cancer have to be sought for in the disturbances of the apparatus and process of secretion." The cause is an obstruction to the blood circulation and an injury to certain nerves. Show us a case of cancer - no matter in what portion of the body that cancer may be - and we will at once show you two injuries which obstruct the blood circulation and injure certain nerves. It is this combination of injured nerves and obstructions which cause cancers.

Having found the cause of cancer, it is an easy thing to relieve the pressure upon the blood vessels and nerves. Arranging the body in a natural condition so that the circulation of blood is free and the pressure is removed from the nerves, the secretion and excretion becomes perfect, and the patient cannot help getting well. In other words, if all the different parts of the machinery of the human body were just right, secretion and excretion would be perfect and all the impurities would be thrown out the back door, instead of finding an outlet elsewhere.

The cause which produces a boil in one place will cause the same effect in another. The causes which produce a cancer in one place do so in another, inside or out.

That which creates a cancer in the left breast would cause one to develop in the right breast; that which incites such abnormal developments in one part of the body will do so in another. In this treatment we have the following advantages, viz: the cause is cured. There is no painful operation. There is no deformity. There is no return of cancer or tumor, because the cause is removed, and the patient is made well throughout. The held up secretions are taken up and passed off through the bowels.

The generally accepted and college taught theory is that lupus and cancer are local diseases, hence cutting, eating or burning them out is the treatment to be used, and this is suggested to you as the only means by which your life can be saved. The operation is over - the butchering and torturing done. Anyone who has ever had a lupus or cancer burned out will admit that the pain produced is beyond the power of language to describe. You have been butchered, tortured, deformed and disfigured. And the saddest and most serious of all is the fact that even after submitting to all the butchery, deformity, etc., you will find the lupus or cancer growing again - there or somewhere else.

The treatment of lupus and cancers by the medical profession has been, and is, an utter failure to cure the afflicted patient. It is worse than useless. Our treatment of the cause is painless and the benefit lasting. The cause of all lupus, cancers and tumors, no matter where located, is the same; when the cause is gone their support is gone and they cease to exist, no matter where they are, inside or out.

\*Palmer DD. *The Chiropractic* 1897 (Jan); 17:2

## Table 1: D.D. Palmer's Publications\*

- 1886-1896**
- The Educator* (not available?)
  - The Magnetic Cure* 1896 (Jan); No. 15 (Palmer College Archives)
- 1897-1902**
- The Chiropractic* 1897 (Jan); No. 17 (Palmer College Archives)
  - The Chiropractic* 1897 (Mar); No. 18 (Palmer College Archives)
  - The Chiropractic* 1899; No. 26 (Palmer College Archives)
  - The Chiropractic* 1900; No. 26 (Palmer College Archives)
  - The Chiropractic* 1902; No. 29 (Palmer College Archives)
- 1903-1906**
- The Chiropractor* 1904 (Dec); Vol. 1, No. 1 and various other issues (Palmer College Archives)
  - The Science of Chiropractic* 1906 (unauthorized book of D.D. Palmer's writings published by BJ Palmer; republished by the Parker Chiropractic Research Foundation, 1988)
- 1908-1910**
- The Chiropractor Adjuster* 1908; Vol. 1, No. 1 (not available?)
  - The Chiropractor Adjuster* 1909 (Jan); Vol. 1, No. 2 (Palmer College Archives)
  - The Chiropractor Adjuster* 1909 (Mar); Vol. 1, No. 3 (Palmer College Archives)
  - The Chiropractor Adjuster* 1909 (Sept); Vol. 1, No. 6 (Palmer College Archives)
  - The Chiropractor Adjuster* 1909 (Dec); Vol. 1, No. 7 (Palmer College Archives)
  - The Chiropractor Adjuster* 1910 (Feb); Vol. 1, No. 8 (Palmer College Archives)
  - The Chiropractor's Adjuster* 1910, Portland Printing House, Portland OR (widely available)
- 1914**
- The Chiropractor* 1914, Beacon Light Printing, Los Angeles (posthumously published by D.D. Palmer's widow; republished in 1970 by Health Research, Inc., Mokelumne Hill, California)

\*Underlined items are books rather than periodicals

**Table 2:** D.D. Palmer's concepts during four periods of publication

<b><u>Concept:</u></b>	<b><u>1897-1902</u></b>	<b><u>1903-06</u></b>	<b><u>1908-10</u></b>	<b><u>1914</u></b>
therapeusis	Yes	No	No	No
method	manipulation	adjustment	adjustment	adjustment
innate/educated	absent	nerves; Intelligence	Intelligence	Intelligence
circulatory obstruction	Yes	No	No	No
machine metaphor	Yes	Yes	No	No
nerve pinching	Yes	Yes	No	No
foraminal occlusion	?	Yes	No	No
tone	(vital)	absent	Yes	Yes
nerve vibration	?	?	Yes	Yes
religious plank	absent	absent	optional?	obligatory?

**Table 3:** The Evolution of the Innate Concept by D.D. Palmer

- 1904:** "innate" nerves are distinguished from "educated" nerves; innate nervous system roughly corresponds to the cerebellum, brain stem and autonomic nervous system; educated nerves provide voluntary nervous control
- 1906:** Innate Intelligence is a "personality" distinct from Educated Intelligence; Innate runs all essential life processes
- 1910:** Innate Intelligence is a subdivision of Universal Intelligence (God); chiropractors have a "bounden duty" to adjust the "cause" of dis-ease so that Innate Intelligence can do its job. Knowledge of Innate Intelligence is not essential to the competent practice of chiropractic
- 1914:** Innate Intelligence regulates all essential life processes; chiropractors have a "moral and religious duty" to remove subluxations so that Innate Intelligence may do its job



**Table 4: Early Development of the Subluxation Construct**

<b>1897- 1902</b>	<b>if any part of the body is displaced, including arteries, veins, nerves, muscles, ligaments, bones and joints, it may create friction, which leads to inflammation and disease</b>
<b>1903- 1906</b>	<b>displacements of the skeletal system pinch the nerves; the nerves are responsible for heating the body</b>
<b>1908- 1910</b>	<b>nerves may be impinged, but not pinched; 95% of all disease is due to impingements of the nervous system in the spine; the other 5% is due to impingements outside the spine, especially in the joints of the feet</b>
<b>1914</b>	<b>vertebrae do not subluxate; only the articular surfaces of joints can subluxate; when spinal joints subluxate, the intervertebral foramina become enlarged and the tension on nerves is altered, which in turn alters end-organ tone</b>

Joseph C. Keating, Jr., Ph.D.  
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December 17, 1991

**Steve Wolk Ph.D., Director of Research**  
*Foundation for Chiropractic Education & Research*  
1701 Clarendon Boulevard  
Arlington VA 22209

Dear Steve,

Thank you for your invitation (12/6/91) to participate in Symposium 1, "Social and historical forces in the evolution of chiropractic health care," at the FCER's International Conference on Spinal Manipulation in Chicago during May 15-17, 1992. Per your request, attached please find the summary for my presentation, "The embryology of D.D. Palmer's chiropractic metaphors and hypotheses." Also enclosed are the biographical sketch, media release form, and a copy of curriculum vita that you requested.

I would appreciate it if you could make available for my presentation a slide projector, overhead (transparency) projector, and a table on which I might lay out the many historical artifacts I wish to make available for inspection for symposium participants.

Thank you. Please have a very happy holiday.

Sincerely,

Joseph C. Keating, Jr., Ph.D.

cc: Herbert J. Vear, D.C., President

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\$35/year regular membership; \$17/year for students