

Dear Editor,

The comments by Peter Lipson, MD, in your featured article [“9 Plain Truths About Alternative Medicine Doctors Desperately Want You to Know.”](#) (originally published in Reader’s Digest, October 2011) related to chiropractic care were inaccurate and misleading to say the least.

An earlier article published by Cassidy et al in the journal [SPINE](#) detailed the largest, most inclusive and in-depth study on the occurrence of vertebral artery dissection in history. The study included a review of nearly 110 million person-years for the occurrence of vertebral artery dissection in the province of Ontario, Canada. The researchers, using comprehensive provincial health records data, found no greater likelihood of a patient experiencing a vertebral artery dissection after seeing a chiropractor than after seeing their primary care physician.

In 2015, an article, authored by researchers at Optum Health an analytics unit of United Health Care, published in [Chiropractic & Manual Therapies](#) reiterated no significant association between chiropractic visits and vertebrobasilar artery system (VBA) stroke, in comparison to an increased association among patients who visited their primary care physicians.

Just recently, Penn State Hershey Medical Center [researchers](#) performed a systematic review and meta-analysis of published data on chiropractic manipulation and cervical artery dissection (CAD), and while the analysis shows a small association between chiropractic neck manipulation and cervical artery dissection – the relationship may be in part due to the high risk of bias and confounding in the available studies. That being said, the report asserts there is no convincing evidence to support a causal link between chiropractic manipulation and CAD.

Dr. Lipson’s view is an out-of-date anecdotal perspective that is contradicted by the aforementioned studies.

Vertebral artery dissection is a rare and often unpredictable event that occurs in 1/100,000 population/per year. Current thinking with respect to vertebral artery dissection is that rather than being “caused” by the primary care physician or the chiropractor or any other provider, it is more likely that the patient is in the process of dissection when they presented for care. A dissection in process produces neck pain and headache – the reason they initially sought health care.

The “take-away” message is not for patients to avoid cervical spine adjustment by a chiropractor, rather that all providers should be more alert to the possibility that neck pain and headache in rare cases may be the result of a vertebral artery dissection in process.

Gerard W. Clum, DC, Spokesperson, Foundation for Chiropractic Progress