

In response to: [“When Alternative Medicine Goes Wrong.”](#) (*Reader’s Digest*, October 2011 Issue)

Dear Editor,

The comments by Peter Lipson, M.D. in your recent article “When Alternative Medicine Goes Wrong” (*Reader’s Digest*, October 2011) related to chiropractic care were inaccurate and misleading to say the least.

In 2008, an 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.

Dr. Lipson’s view is an out-of-date anecdotal perspective that is contradicted by the findings of the Cassidy study. 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 healthcare.

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.

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