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MEDIA RELEASE

AMA and RACGP CONTINUE UNFOUNDED ATTACKS ON CHIROPRACTIC CARE OF CHILDREN WHILE 167 VICTORIAN PATIENTS DIE FROM SERIOUS FAILURES IN MEDICAL CARE September 11, 2024

1. The Age reports incidents detailed in a new Safer Care Victoria (SCV) Report published online last week that in 2023 a record 245 patients had suffered serious harm of which 167 died due to serious errors during medical procedures. This included harm to children and the disturbing data only related to Victorian hospitals.
2. The 2019 SCV Review into harm to children under 12 years of age arising from chiropractic care in Australia reported in November 2019 that not a single case of harm to a child was identified or confirmed.
3. Further, the SCV Chiropractic Report confirmed receipt of 21,824 public submissions over a four-week period from parents of children who have attended a chiropractor, and 21,474 of these parents (98%) reported that their child's health condition had either improved or resolved following chiropractic care.
4. Importantly, 81% of these parents confirmed they had previously consulted with medical and medical adjunctive practitioners without improvement or resolution before attending the chiropractor.
5. Patrons of Chiropractic Science strongly suggests the AMA and RACGP get their own houses in order before continuing the baseless attacks on the chiropractic profession, which is yet to harm a single child.

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) and Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) persist in making false claims of harm and risks associated with chiropractic care of infants, and actively lobby the various Health Ministers and their advisors with such claims. These medical interest groups often exaggerate and inflame matters pertaining to chiropractic treatment to distract the public from negative news related to harm and deaths resulting from conventional medical health care, or to protect an industry that they deem to be exclusively their province.

The 2019 Safer Care Victoria (SCV) Review was a totally independent, government-funded inquiry that called for parents to describe the harm and lack of success arising from their child's visit to a chiropractor. 21,824 parents responded, and to SCV's surprise, these parents reported no harm to the child in their care. Additionally, the main Professional Indemnity insurer for chiropractors had no record of a claim relating to a child over the previous 20 years. Further, 21,474 of the respondents reported the child's complaint either improved or resolved, which is clear evidence of benefit. The majority of the SCV data related to infants under 2 years of age.

81% of these parents confirmed they previously had their child attend a medical or adjunct practitioner for the same condition without success.

The respondents listed the main child health presentations to the chiropractor seeing positive results were posture (31.7%), Colic (28.7%), neck pain (23.5%), breastfeeding issues (22.6%), back pain (21.9%) and headaches (14.9%), walking problems (10.8%), special needs and ADHD (10.5%), crawling issues (8.7%), bedwetting-enuresis (8.3%), Asthma (7%).

The SCV Report confirmed a 98% improvement or resolution of these and other conditions that were validly reported by the Australian public. This by any standard is evidence of benefit, and certainly positively contributed to an improved sense of well-being for both the infant or child patient, and the parents. The public statement issued by the Federal Minister for Health that chiropractic “*has no evidence to support its efficacy*” is simply false and misleading. In fact, chiropractic, and both the medical surgical and clinical branches (as well as many general medical practise activities) fail to offer strong standards of evidence for the vast majority of their procedures. This largely relates to ethical and methodological reasons. To blind a group of patients and deny care (required to meet a standard of strong evidence) is both discriminatory and in breach of our respective oaths of care.

Ebell et al 2017 findings published in the British Medical Journal, confirm that with primary care-oriented medical treatment, only 18% of recommendations were based on consistent, high-quality patient-oriented evidence, while over half were based on expert opinion, usual historic care or disease-oriented evidence.

A detailed systematic review by Howick et al of 1,567 medical interventions into the extent of high quality evidence tested by Cochrane Reviews was conducted in 2022. This confirmed that 94% of medical interventions were not supported by high quality evidence. This study also confirmed that more than half the medical interventions are supported by weak evidence, such as expert opinion and case studies, similar to much of the chiropractic clinical evidence of efficacy. The study concluded that more than 9 in 10 medical healthcare interventions studied within recent Cochrane Reviews were not supported by high-quality evidence, and notably, harms were significantly under-reported.

Clearly it is unreasonable for the Federal, State and Territory Health Ministers to hold chiropractic care to a standard of evidence that even the vast majority of medical procedures fail to achieve.

PCS also reminds the public of the cluster of many avoidable Bacchus Marsh Hospital infants deaths (between 2008 and 2015) that arose from a combination of malpractice and misconduct. Not just harm, actual deaths. This was not an isolated incident, as in 2018 a 4 day old infant died in Sunshine Hospital. Just a few weeks ago we hear of Coroners reporting of an infant death in 2021 at the Wangaratta Hospital and another at the Geelong University Hospital in 2022, each of these deaths caused by similar preventable measures. However, in the isolated cases of such failures and breaches, the individual practitioner must be censured or disciplined, not the entire dedicated profession.

PCS trusts the unjustified restrictions on chiropractic care of children under 2 years of age will shortly be removed, as clearly many infants and child patients benefit from chiropractic care. Additionally, it remains a fundamental right for a patient or guardian of a child to choose their preferred mode of health care.

Christopher Hart
PCS President

Jackie Malady
PCS Secretary

References:

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Patrons of Chiropractic Science is a research organisation and registered Australian charity that focuses on Chiropractic clinical research, publication and review of peer reviewed studies and general public health matters.