Queen’s chiropractic practice-based research network: preliminary results

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Background
Practice-based research in the chiropractic profession is desperately needed. Chiropractic is traditionally an under-researched profession and there is only scant reliable information available for even the most fundamental aspects of chiropractic clinical practice, including who seeks the care of chiropractors, for what reasons and what care is provided. The objectives of this study were to 1) Develop a practice-based research network (PBRN) of chiropractors in the Queen’s University region, and 2) Conduct practice-based research in the PBRN to better understand the nature of chiropractic members’ clinical practice.

Methods
We invited 20 chiropractors to participate in the PBRN. Chiropractors recorded consecutive patient encounters on handwritten paper encounter forms until 100 encounters were recorded, or when four weeks recording had elapsed. Three inter-related data collections were undertaken including chiropractor characteristics, encounter data, and patient characteristics. Data were analyzed using summary statistics and adjusted for clustering.

Results
Chiropractor Participants (Figures 1 and 4)
Study participants were similar to all chiropractors in Ontario, Canada, with respect to sex distribution. Chiropractors who completed the study differed with respect to age, with a mean age of 39 years compared to 45 years of all Ontario chiropractors.

Patients (Figure 3)
- The majority (68%) of patients between the ages of 25 to 64.
- In 54% of encounters the patient was female.
- 95% of encounters were by patients previously seen by the chiropractor.

Encounters (Figures 5 to 7)
- The most frequent problem managed by participating chiropractors was back syndrome without radiating pain (20%).
- 88% of encounters were due to musculoskeletal complaints.
- The most common forms of care provided were soft tissue therapy (68%), manual adjustment (57%), and mobilization (47%).

Discussion
Increasing practice-based research in the chiropractic profession is essential, and the PBRN model may facilitate this. This first step to understand the chiropractor and patient profile of members within the network will lead to opportunities to conduct further research projects within the network.