

Review of: "Changing chiropractic's subluxation rhetoric: Moving on from 'deniers', 'vitalists', and 'unorthodox', to realists, post-realists, and absurdists"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The topic of this article is both interesting and necessary in the chiropractic profession. There is debate between factions in chiropractic centered on the significance, or lack thereof, of the spinal subluxation as an entity of focus in chiropractic practice. The author of this article suggests a robust debate be published on this subject in open-access format. Such a suggestion would require those on opposite ends of the spectrum of opinions on this subject to be willing to meaningfully express their reasons for their positions on the matter. It is an entirely different consideration, however, as to whether or not it is realistic to believe that such an occurrence is probable.

Ebrall offers three new terms to describe the factions in the debate about subluxation: realists, post-realists, and absurdists. Realists acknowledge that subluxations exist and have an impact on health, and that subluxation-focused treatment can help. Post-realists deny the realists' concept of subluxations as a clinical reality. He also discusses the distinction between those who claim to belong to the profession and those who actually practice chiropractic clinically. These are some of the influential factions that form the basis for considerable political influence on the direction of the chiropractic profession.

Ebrall offers philosophical characterizations, as well as describing the philosophical arguments of others, in the debate on the significance of the spinal subluxation as a pivotal issue in chiropractic. He further poses the interesting question of whether or not it is appropriate to define a point of view of chiropractic as orthodoxy if it aligns with the medical profession's view of health care and as unorthodox if the perspective is not consistent with the views of medicine. I found this concern to be quite cogent, as it may well be the root of the matter between the factions in this debate. If one's philosophy is more aligned with the principles of medicine, then their view of the foundational principles of spinal subluxations will be at odds with their philosophy. Chiropractic and medicine are different professions with different principles. Medicine is the science and art of diagnosing and treating disease or injury, primarily with drugs, injections, and surgery, to maintain or restore health. Chiropractic is a system of noninvasive therapy that holds that certain disorders result from nervous system dysfunction arising from misalignment and dysfunction of the spinal joints (subluxation) and that focuses treatment mainly on the adjustment and manipulation of the spinal vertebrae. Clearly, one can see that those two views and approaches to health care are fundamentally different.

Ebrall further points out that while claiming to follow evidence-based practice principles, the post-realists seem to ignore the evidence that might support the basis for a subluxation-focused clinical approach. He accuses the post-realist

absurdists of gaslighting the conventional realists' understanding of chiropractic. That accusation is credible in this reviewer's experience. But he notes that unhelpful and regrettable rhetoric exists on both sides of this debate. For instance, the defenders of the realists have used terms such as "deniers" and "drug pushers" to describe leaders of the post-realist side. This reviewer agrees that there are absurdists on both sides of this debate. Some far-sided realists overstate the principles of chiropractic in a non-realistic manner that stretches the logic and purported effects of the fundamental existence of subluxations as a clinical entity. But denying the very existence of the idea that spinal subluxations exist, affect health beyond pain, and when treated with adjustments, manipulations, or mobilizations can result in improvements in health beyond pain reduction is to deny clinical reality (post-realism). These assertions are relevant to current matters affecting the direction of the chiropractic profession.

Ebrall sees the timelessness of the fundamental subluxation concepts, whereas post-realists characterize them as outdated or merely historic. He further contends that the subluxation agnostics lack evidence for their null hypothesis that subluxations don't exist, yet present themselves as evidence-based. He also points to the minority of those associated with the profession who have gone on record as subluxation agnostics, which amounts to about 200 individuals. This is a small minority, and the bulk of the profession are conventional realists. He wonders why there is such a majority of those on the realists' side if there is no credible basis for their position. He does admit, however, that a small number of post-realists have published reasonable bases for their anti-subluxation positions. But he contrasts that with the presence of over 1600 articles available from the Index of Chiropractic Literature that are indexed with the term "subluxation."

He summarizes his commentary by saying that chiropractic's state of ignorance is its rhetoric, not its position. He believes that conventional chiropractors have been intellectually abused by the post-realists through ridicule of the idea of subluxation. And finally, he asks that "we collectively move forward with courteous debate in the mode of philosophical argument from our respective positions."

This is a fine piece of work, and I commend Dr. Ebrall for his efforts, without which such unjust viewpoints would go nearly unchallenged in chiropractic.