Chiropractic spinal manipulation for whiplash injury? A systematic review of controlled clinical trials

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CRD summary
The review concluded there was no trial evidence to suggest that chiropractic spinal manipulation was an effective treatment for whiplash injury. This was based on finding no eligible studies. The authors' conclusions appear appropriate, although it is possible that relevant studies may have been missed.

Authors' objectives
To evaluate the effectiveness of chiropractic spinal manipulation for treating whiplash injury.

Searching
MEDLINE, EMBASE, CINAHL and AMED were searched from inception to August 2008 (without language restrictions). Departmental files were hand-searched.

Study selection
Controlled studies of chiropractic spinal manipulation (spinal adjustments performed by a chiropractor) in patients with whiplash injury were eligible for inclusion.

The authors stated neither how studies were selected for inclusion nor how many reviewers performed the selection.

Assessment of study quality
No studies were found so validity assessment could not be performed.

Data extraction
No studies were found so data extraction could not be performed.

Methods of synthesis
No studies were found so a synthesis could not be performed.

Results of the review
No studies were found which met the inclusion criteria.

Authors' conclusions
The results of this study provided no trial evidence to suggest that chiropractic spinal manipulation was an effective treatment for whiplash injury.

CRD commentary
The review addressed a clear question supported by appropriate inclusion criteria. Several relevant databases were searched, although it appeared no specific attempts were made to identify unpublished studies. The authors did not state which methods were used to select studies for inclusion (such as independent duplicate selection), so it was unclear whether this process was free from the possibility of reviewer error and bias. No eligible studies were found so the authors' conclusions appear appropriate, although there remains the possibility that relevant studies could have been missed.

Implications of the review for practice and research
The authors stated that in the absence of (urgently needed) trial data, positive recommendations did not seem responsible.

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This is a critical abstract of a systematic review that meets the criteria for inclusion on DARE. Each critical abstract contains a brief summary of the review methods, results and conclusions followed by a detailed critical assessment on the reliability of the review and the conclusions drawn.