

*This is a resident case log of a patient encounter in which  
an “Aware Medicine topic” was central.*

### Out of Alignment: Chiropractic and Safety

I spent my Wednesday nights during May and June covering the ER as part of a rural rotation. During one of my shifts, I met a seven year old boy and his mother. He had a 3 day history of sore throat, low-grade fevers, nausea and decreased appetite. Home treatment included rest, Tylenol and a visit to the local chiropractor. The boy’s mother reported that “he was out of alignment”, but that the manipulation didn’t seem to help the sore throat. He was seen in the chiropractor’s office in the afternoon of day two of the illness and in the ER on day three at 11:30 pm. It wasn’t until he started developing a rash across his face that his mother brought him in for medical attention. A rapid strep test was positive and he was started on antibiotics.

The boy and his siblings had been going to the chiropractor for years to treat minor illnesses and alignment problems. It wouldn’t have crossed my mind to take my child to the chiropractor to alleviate a sore throat or earache. I have never been to a chiropractor and don’t have a personal appreciation for the techniques that are employed during a treatment session. However, in my short time seeing patients in my own clinic, I have seen several negative outcomes from neck manipulations. The lasting effects and implications for later quality of life have affected my perspective and feelings about chiropractic treatment, especially when it is focused on the neck.

We clearly had different opinions about the role of chiropractic therapy in children. While I tried to understand why she believed that “realignment” would cure a sore throat, I never really did. During our short interaction in the emergency room, I didn’t voice my concerns, as it was clear that his mother really felt she was helping her son. Instead, we discussed the signs and symptoms of strep pharyngitis so that she could recognize them in the future. Ultimately, it is her decision where she takes her son for care and I tried to let her know, without being judgmental, what a visit to her son’s primary care provider could offer.