

Chiropractic adjustment contributed to woman's death, Que. coroner concludes

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A Quebec coroner has recommended a full review of chiropractic neck treatments, saying a cervical adjustment contributed to the death of woman in 2006.

Coroner Paul G. Dionne released his recommendations Thursday, more than a year after Pierrette Parisien died following chiropractic care for severe neck pain.

What is chiropractic?

Chiropractic is an alternative health-care system aimed at diagnosing and treating mechanical disorders of the spine and musculo-skeletal system. Adherents and practitioners believe it positively affects the nervous system and improves overall health.

To become a chiropractor, people normally receive five years of postgraduate training in anatomy and physiology. When they graduate, they're granted the degree of doctor of chiropractic.

Dionne told CBC News that Parisien's death was accidental but the chiropractic neck adjustments "created damages to the blood vessels in her neck, leading to her death."

"The neck adjustment, and with the clinical symptoms, contributed and is the cause of her vascular problems and her death."

Parisien, a 36-year-old mother of two who lived in the Montérégie region southwest of Montreal, had receiving regular chiropractic care from the same practitioner for nine years before her death.

She went for treatment in February 2006 after she developed headaches and dizziness from acute neck pain. Parisien visited a chiropractor three times that winter, with the third visit proving to be her last.

She fell unconscious after treatment and slipped into a coma, dying two days later.

Dionne said the chiropractor, who is not named in the report, should never have treated Parisien given the symptoms she reported.

He recommended the Quebec Order of Chiropractors review procedures used to evaluate similar cases and to prescribe neck adjustments.

Chiropractic organization backs report

The organization said it agreed with the coroner's conclusions. A spokesman said the practitioner in question made a serious error in judgment, because neck adjustments are considered inappropriate for the symptoms that Parisien presented.

"The chiropractor misdiagnosed the condition of the patient," said a spokesman for the organization, Richard Dussault.

"He should not have given the treatments that he did, and he should have immediately referred her for vascular investigation."

Dussault argued that the case was an isolated incident, saying chiropractors are careful when diagnosing patients. "You can have confidence chiropractic treatments are safe and effective. The chiropractor must do a thorough history."

Chiropractic manipulation is safely done millions of times a year in Canada to treat back and neck pain and other ailments. However, it's not the first time that there has been public controversy over the safety of the procedure.

Although Parisien's death is believed to be the first of its kind in Quebec, several people have died in other provinces shortly after chiropractic manipulations, spurring questions and public inquests.

In 2002, more than 60 neurologists from across the country signed a letter warning that the treatment can lead to strokes. They say if the neck is rotated improperly, a blood vessel can tear, causing a clot to form.

The practitioner in the Parisien case has been fined \$6,000 and said he regrets his error. He continues to practice chiropractic.

Parisien's family plan to seek legal action against the chiropractor, said a lawyer they've retained, Jean-Pierre Ménard.