

Weicker To Sign Medical Liability Insurance Bill Today

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Chiropractors, famous for treating sore backs, are experiencing pain in a somewhat lower region as the result of physicians who don't approve of chiropractors' century-old tradition of realigning the spine to reduce pain and improve health.

General Assembly committees will consider two bills that could affect the state's 622 resident, licensed chiropractors. One would limit chiropractors to patients age 18 and older and ban chiropractic manipulation of the neck. The other would allow health plan patients to go directly to chiropractors, circumventing primary-care doctors who might not refer a patient to a chiropractor.

The bill to limit chiropractic practice was offered by Rep. Ann P. Dandrow, R-Southington, at the request of Dr. Ludmil A. Chotkowski, a retired physician, former Berlin health director and no fan of chiropractic. The bill would seem to have a slim chance of becoming law. It is headed for the legislature's public health committee, whose Senate chairman, George L. "Doc" Gunther, R-Stratford, is a naturopathic physician who says a chiropractor cured him of childhood polio. Gunther said the bill's fate is up to the entire committee but added that it is, in his opinion, "the most stupid thing I've ever read." The bill will be referred next week to Gunther's committee, which will decide whether to schedule a public hearing.

The bill to provide direct patient access to a chiropractor for "acute care treatment" is given a 50-50 shot by James Amann, D-Milford, the House chairman of the insurance and real estate committee. A public hearing on that measure is set for 10 a.m. Tuesday in Room D of the Legislative Office Building.

Chotkowski believes that because chiropractic treatment is unscientific and potentially dangerous, children -- who are unable to make medical decisions for themselves -- should be off-limits to chiropractors.

In this, Chotkowski must face off against parents who say their children have benefited from treatment by chiropractors. Mary Sadlon of Glastonbury, a registered nurse, says Glastonbury chiropractor Eva Salzer helped her infant son, Patrick, stand and walk normally. "I truly believe some children can benefit from chiropractic," she says.

In addition, Chotkowski would halt chiropractic manipulation of the neck -- technically, the cervical vertebrae that support the head. He says that there is no evidence that it does any good, and that it could result in a stroke or other neurological damage.

He cited the case of Linda Solsbury of New Britain, who suffered a paralyzing stroke hours after her neck was manipulated by East Lyme chiropractor Thomas Goulding. Solsbury contended that Goulding caused her stroke. Goulding claimed that it was the result of pre-existing health problems. A New London Superior Court jury agreed with Solsbury in 1991 and awarded her \$10 million, but Goulding -- uninsured and bankrupt -- couldn't pay.

The danger of stroke or other brain injury was termed "small but significant" by two California researchers in a 1994 paper. They set it at one in every 500,000 manipulations, but others have estimated the risk at closer to one in 1 million.

"The studies showing the possibility of that {stroke} happening are minuscule," says Middletown chiropractor Candito C. Carroccia, president of the Connecticut Chiropractic Association, which includes some 450 state practitioners.

The bill put forward by chiropractors would allow patients to go to a chiropractor for accidental injury or a sudden bout of pain without first asking permission of their primary-care physicians. A physician who doesn't approve of chiropractic might not make the referral. The patient must then pay out-of-pocket to see the chiropractor.