

2004 Healthy Spines Program: What do Chiropractors say?

by Kathleen Stacey

National Healthy Spines Program Consultant

CEO Comments: The National Board set aside funding for the healthy spines program to run in three states over the next twelve months. The first training sessions are nearing completion and I asked Kathleen Stacey who is the national program consultant to write an article on the progress of the program to date. The 7-session course was developed and taught by Kathleen. She has a strong background in primary health care, health promotion, community-based human services and projects, as well as university teaching and professional training. Here is her article which includes comments from chiropractors who have participated in the program.

“Healthy Spines is a national health promotion program in Australia that has been funded by the CAA as a community service initiative. The Healthy Spines website is going live in early June, so you can find out more information about the background, history and activities of Healthy Spines at www.healthyspines.com.au. It has two goals - to support primary school-aged children and their school communities to:

- improve their knowledge about spinal health and spinal care
- strengthen their ability to promote spinal health and spinal care in the school environment.

Volunteer Chiropractors qualify to become Healthy Spines Program Team Members (PTMs) by completing a comprehensive 60-hour training course taught over two weekends with follow-up readings, journals, a classroom observation and a final teleconference. They learn about primary health care, health promotion (the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health), creating partnerships with schools, working with children and evaluating health promotion. Thirty-seven Chiropractors are completing the final requirements of this course and in June will start working with schools mostly in NSW and Victoria, with one each in the ACT and Queensland.

Danny Bayer does a session on working with children in schools – he has specialist skills in health education and is the Chief Moderator for Health Education in South Australia. Dr Paula Stacey is the National Program Manager and the lead person of the original group who

piloted the Healthy Spines program in South Australia. She joins the course for the final two sessions to help participants put their knowledge and skills into practice through role-plays, scenario discussions and debriefings so people feel well prepared for their role.

The PTMs have been divided into four groups. Each has a Team Leader who provides support and guidance to all members, and coordinates and sends information on the team’s work to Kathleen and Paula who have the national overview of the program. We asked the Team Leaders to share what they think about Healthy Spines now they have done the training and why they wanted to take up a Team Leader role. Here is what they said:

Dr Criss Partridge – Victorian Team Leader: *I became a Team leader for Healthy Spines to lend logistical support to Kathleen and Paula in Victoria. Since completing the training program, I have realised how important this is to the progression of Chiropractic as a profession and world health as a whole. With the WHO (World Health Organisation) taking the initiative to make health promotion a high priority, it is common sense for Chiropractors to “get in on the act,” as we are experts on holistic health care. I see Healthy Spines to be of such significance that in the future, it will be part of Chiropractic education at colleges around the world and I intend to be part of a movement that makes Australian and New Zealand colleges the forerunners. The potential for Healthy Spines to allow Chiropractic philosophy to be enlarged, enhanced and spread through this type of program is limitless. All Chiropractors should become involved with future Healthy Spines programs.*

Dr Brett Lodding – Victorian Team Leader: *I had my doubts about all the theory in the training program at first, but having done the activities and follow up work and now reflecting back on it I can see the relevance of it and the need within the program. It showed me what I didn’t know and then taught me those things. The training program has helped me to feel enthusiastic, excited and anticipatory. I can’t wait to get started. I think that the Healthy Spines program is excellent and something Chiropractic definitely needs. I became a team leader because I believe in Paula and Kathleen’s dream and would like to help them grow Healthy Spines into the broad reaching program we all know it can and should be.*

Dr Lisa Huber-Setter – NSW Team Leader (although based in Queensland): *I am very excited about this project*

and my “new” role as a health facilitator. I have enjoyed stretching my brain with this course - I guess the best thing I can say as to the quality of this program is that I am now considering a career in health promotion! I applaud the CAA's commitment to doing something, which is good for the community at large and not just for chiropractic.

Dr Rob Tosswill – NSW Team Leader: *Why did I get involved in healthy spines? Initially, the motives were purely selfish. Despite my best efforts at trying to get my own kids to adopt the principles of spinal health with only moderate success, this project seemed to fit the bill for expanding my repertoire of skills to try and get good practices through to them. However, it is so much more than just this. It is about real education not just telling them about what to do. It is about changing attitudes of the kids and the school community as a whole. How successful? We will find out after the program, but I feel positive about it. The training program, whilst heavy going theoretically, in some parts left me with a thirst to get stuck in to it and have fun with it as well. As to why I became a Team Leader, it seemed to me to be the logical step, to put something back in to a project that I had already got so much out of. Interesting considering at that stage I hadn't set foot in a classroom yet! All I hope now is that it keeps getting better and better.*

The training program will be evaluated and reported on later this year, along with the overall Healthy Spines program. People were surprised at the amount of work in the training program and several grumbled along the way, as it is very different compared with many other CPD options for Chiropractors. However, having reached the end many people commented that it was important to cover all the areas included so they had a good understanding of program design and content, and what was involved in their role.

Participants appreciated the professional approach with a strong focus on quality, as the work of Healthy Spines reflects on them personally and the profession as a whole. Although some people wanted more information on the training and Healthy Spines program before they started, and we will do that in future, others were not sure it would make much difference. To appreciate the full meaning, activities and reasons behind the program you “had to be there!” We hope others will “want to be there” if the CAA funds Healthy Spines beyond 2004.”