

“I Expected to be Pain Free”:
Exploring Athletes’ Expectations
and Experiences of Care Received
by Sports Chiropractors

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Introduction

- Patient satisfaction and their experience with care can guide practitioners in establishing doctor-patient relationships and improving outcomes
- Evidence suggests high patient satisfaction with general chiropractic care
- Limited understanding of athletes receiving sports chiropractic care.



Study Aim and Objectives

- To explore the expectations and experiences of Canadian athletes receiving care from chiropractors with specialized sport training
- To understand what athletes expect and experience from clinical encounter with sport chiropractor
- To understand the athlete's perspective of the role of sport chiropractic in research and performance



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Methods

- A qualitative study design through interpretivist lens
- Canadian athletes were purposively recruited until data saturation was reached
- Semi-structured interviews conducted online and transcribed verbatim.
- Transcripts were independently analyzed by two coders using content analysis
- Analysis and reporting was guided by the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ)



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Demographics

Subject #	Sex	Sport	Age Range	LOC
1	Female	Track and Field	Adult	National
2	Male	Weight Lifting	Master	Provincial
3	Male	Lacrosse	Adult	Varsity
4	Female	Gymnastics	Young	National
5	Female	Track and Field	Master	National
6	Female	Hockey	Adult	National
7	Male	Baseball	Adult	Varsity
8	Male	Track and Field	Adult	National
9	Female	Paddling	Adult	National
10	Female	Track and Field	Adult	National
11	Female	Paddling	Master	National
12	Male	Skiing	Adult	National
13	Female	Combat Sports	Adult	National
14	Male	Skiing	Adult	National
15	Male	Combat Sports	Master	National
16	Female	Combat Sports	Adult	Provincial
17	Male	Football	Adult	National
18	Female	Combat Sports	Adult	National



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Results

- Reasons for seeking care
 - acute care, injury prevention, enhancing performance and maintenance care
 - *“I was expecting just to get like adjusted. I feel the reputation chiropractors have is just like straight up crack your back and leave but I got so much more.” S8*
 - *“When I walked in, I expected only just to be pain free, but after like my first two visits, I was like, I won’t just come out pain free but I will come out of it better than I originally was before I was hurt.” S7*



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Results

- Athletes' experiences
 - a variety of interventions, reassurance, varying treatment times, and reported positive impact on their athletic performance
 - *“...at some point early on, she took each of us for a full assessment and just wanted to **see the whole picture**. So, it wasn't like I just had some little thing nagging me and I saw her about that. Like she wanted to do the whole assessment, get the big picture and really be able to give me the best treatment I could get and not just focus on one little thing.” S12*



Results

- Athletes expect:
 - whole body assessment, symptom improvement, good communication and expertise from the chiropractor
 - *“So sometimes I may hold myself back just so that I don't hurt myself, but then I won't perform at the level that I am supposed to be performing at. But **if I am being treated, I will feel a lot more confident** and be able to kind of like, risk my body a little bit more, and in turn play better, perform better because I know that when I get off the field, I will be getting treatment to be able to play again the next week and be okay. If I don't feel like I will be getting the right treatment ... then I might be a little bit more hesitant in terms of how I play. Does that make sense?” S17*
- Some athletes suggested interpersonal and interprofessional communication could be improved
 - *I feel like in general I am kind of the middle person (laugh) and so I communicate and am directing everything for myself.” S10*

Suggestions for a Research Agenda

- Suggested areas of research included: injury mechanics and prevention, impact of care on performance, and interprofessional collaboration
 - “Literally I mean like finding thousandths is not insignificant.” S10.
 - “I don’t know if I am just a mess, but I can have a great week of training and then like take the weekend off and then literally just do walking and like have a twinge in my ankle or my knee or something, like what is that? Is that preventable or just me breaking down over time? But anyway, yeah I would say ***injury prevention needs to be studied more*** in my opinion.” S17



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Discussion

- Our data supports previous surveys of sports chiropractic practice that reported the use of:
 - multi-modal care interventions
 - treatment of the extremities
 - treatment intentions to improve sport performance
- Reviews suggest little effect of chiropractic manipulation on performance compared to athletes’ perspective
 - may need to examine the full encounter
- High levels of satisfaction
 - lower satisfaction with non-sport chiropractor
 - need to improve communication



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Conclusion

- In general, athletes were very satisfied with care
- Overall athletes' expectations and experiences aligned but changed over time
- Findings can be used to enhance the quality of care provided to athletes from sports chiropractors and help to inform future research agendas
- Further work assessing if athletes in other competitive levels have similar experiences and expectations is needed.



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Thank you for your attention.
Questions?



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