



Oregon

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Press Release
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For Immediate Release

Chiropractic Board Determines “NASA Medical Breakthrough” Advertising Claims Are Deceptive & Misleading;

Other “Medical Breakthrough” and Related Claims To Be Examined

At their February 8, 2007 meeting, the Oregon Board of Chiropractic Examiners (OBCE) determined that “NASA Medical Breakthrough” advertising claims promoting use of spinal decompression/traction devices are deceptive and misleading. A typical claim is that an *“Accidental Discovery by NASA in Outer Space Quickly and Easily Solves 86% of Back Pain... Astronauts that left with back pain would come back without it. So NASA did what they are good at...they investigated this new phenomenon.”* Another version says, *“NASA found during the anti-gravity state of the space travel mission, astronauts were relieved of back pain. NASA found disc height was increased during a space mission. Scientists started looking at “decompression” as a way to help chronic back pain sufferers and the results were overwhelmingly positive in many patients.”*

In November the OBCE issued a request for information to advertisers to provide supporting information, including to Axiom Worldwide Inc. in Tampa Florida, vendor of the DRX 9000 traction device. Neither Axiom nor anyone else has come forward to refute other information which says, “Back Pain is one of the most frequently occurring medical problems during space flight. It has been reported by 68% of astronauts.”¹

The OBCE has also decided to review other advertising statements which the Board believes are likely misleading. These include any advertising that spinal decompression/traction devices are a “medical breakthrough,” claims of superiority such as “Non-surgical spinal decompression is the most promising disc pain treatment today,” and statements contrasting spinal decompression favorably with drugs or surgery without mentioning other kinds of chiropractic treatment. Chiropractic physicians with these advertisements will be asked to provide supporting evidence by the Board’s March 15, 2007 meeting.

Oregon law states chiropractors may not “use any advertising making untruthful, improper, misleading or deceptive statements.” (ORS 684.100 (1)(j)) The OBCE’s policy is that advertising statements must be supported by credible evidence which must be available for review upon request. Chiropractors must also identify clearly their profession in all their advertising as “chiropractor,” “chiropractic physician,” or “chiropractic” in the clinic name.

Jeffrey Tunick DC, Lordex Spine Institute of Portland, who uses the Lordex Decompression device addressed the Board and said “The end result (of this form of traction) is decompression of compressive lesions in the spine, and it does it in a way that traditional traction does not. All decompression devices are capable. It’s unfair to the public to say any one machine is the only true device. This NASA thing has become a marketing tool that has misled both practitioners and patients.” According to OBCE President Minga Guerrero DC, “The OBCE has not taken a formal position on spinal decompression treatments but does recognize there are potential benefits with this form of traction that need further investigation.”

The OBCE also supported a proposal by Dr. Tunick to form an organization of chiropractic physicians and others who utilize spinal decompression/traction to address advertising and marketing issues.

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1. “Depression, Mood State, and Back Pain During Microgravity Simulated by Bed Rest,” Styf, Hutchinson et al, Psychosomatic Medicine 63:862-864 (2001)

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For more information, contact OBCE Dave McTeague, Executive Director



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November 17, 2006

Chiropractic Board Questions "NASA Medical Breakthrough" Advertising Claims

The Oregon Board of Chiropractic Examiners (OBCE) is questioning "NASA Medical Breakthrough" advertising claims promoting use of spinal decompression devices and requesting information.* A typical claim is that an *"Accidental Discovery by NASA in Outer Space Quickly and Easily Solves 86% of Back Pain... Astronauts that left with back pain would come back without it. So NASA did what they are good at...they investigated this new phenomenon."* Another version reads as follows,

"NASA was the first to investigate the effects of spinal decompression on vertebral discs. NASA found during the anti-gravity state of the space travel mission, astronauts were relieved of back pain. NASA found disc height was increased during a space mission. Scientists started looking at "decompression" as a way to help chronic back pain sufferers and the results were overwhelmingly positive in many patients."

Information obtained by the OBCE casts doubt on the validity of these advertising claims. One study published in *Psychosomatic Medicine* in 2001 states, "Back Pain is one of the most frequently occurring medical problems during space flight. It has been reported by 68% of astronauts."¹ Another 2001 article in the same journal states, "astronauts grow taller in space, and stretching of the spinal nerve roots can lead to back pain."² A 2004 article in *Aviation Space Environmental Medicine* states, "Lengthening of the vertebral column and associated lumbar back pain experienced by astronauts is common in microgravity."³ A paper titled "Advanced Trauma Life Support for the Injured Astronaut" states, "... back pain is common upon return to gravity and may confound physical examination of a possible spine injury."⁴

The OBCE notes that nowhere in the various "Free Reports" that are provided by some chiropractors using this marketing plan is there documentation of any NASA studies or reports. The Board has written to Axiom Worldwide Inc. in Tampa Florida, vendor of the DRX 9000 device, asking for information which supports these claims. Axiom packages the "Free Report" marketing plan along with their units. Axiom has not responded to this request.

The OBCE has also asked Western States Chiropractic College and the Foundation for Chiropractic Research and Education if there is any support for these claims. The OBCE is requesting any information either supportive or non-supportive as regards any "NASA Medical Breakthrough" and spinal decompression.

Oregon law states chiropractors may not "use any advertising making untruthful, improper, misleading or deceptive statements." (ORS 684.100 (1)(j)) The OBCE's policy is that

advertising statements must be supported by credible evidence which must be available for review upon request.

Previously the OBCE has informed chiropractors that the 86% success rate claim violates the administrative rule which prohibits any advertising which “contains statistical or other assertions of predicted rates of success of treatment...” (OAR 811-015-0045)

According to OBCE Executive Director Dave McTeague, “The Board is concerned about high pressure marketing to potential patients using questionable claims. The typical treatment protocol calls for twenty treatments over a six-week course of therapy.⁵ Add to that the financial pressures of purchasing a DRX 9000 type device (upwards of 65,000 to \$125,000, Used 2005 model on Ebay for \$65,000) and there may be other motives for the treatment program than optimal patient care.”⁶

1. “Depression, Mood State, and Back Pain During Microgravity Simulated by Bed Rest,” Styf, Hutchinson et al, Psychosomatic Medicine 63:862-864 (2001)
2. “Physical and Psychological Challenges of Space Travel: An Overview,” Ziegler, Psychosomatic Medicine 63:859-861 (2001)
3. “Back pain during 6 degrees head-down tilt approximates that during actual microgravity,” Hutchinson, Watenpaugh, Convertino, Hargens; Aviation Space Environmental Medicine, March 1995.
4. “Advanced Trauma Life Support for the Injured Astronaut,” Third Edition, Cheatham, Department of Surgical Education, Orlando Regional Medical Center.
5. “Medical Treatment Protocol,” DRX9000 Operator’s Manual, Axiom Worldwide, Page 35.
6. “A popular machine to relieve back pain has the support of some doctors and patients, but not Medicare and the insurance industry.” Kris Hundley, St. Petersburg Floride Times, July 17, 2006. http://www.sptimes.com/2006/07/17/Business/Insurers_back_off.shtml
7. Anesthesia & Pain Coder's Pink Sheet Special Investigative Report (December 2005) http://www.ucg.com/images/APP0512_SpecialReport_001.pdf

*The OBCE has made no conclusions about the efficacy of spinal decompression. The OBCE takes issue with the advertising claims of these devices.

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For more information, contact OBCE Dave McTeague, Executive Director