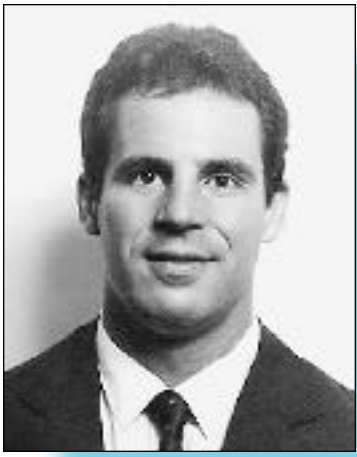


# Beware of Your Best Patients!



by Dwight DeGeorge, DC

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*He has been in for 13 years. He was past president of the Pettibon Biomechanics Club at Palmer College and he has taught spinal biomechanics/biophysics throughout the country for the last nine years. He is responsible for the first research papers ever published in JMPT by Palmer College students. He practices CBP® technique and is a CBP® certified instructor.*

*Presently, Dr. DeGeorge is the inventor of the Compression Extension Traction Table as well as the Spine Aligner adjusting table. Three studies have been published (one at SPINE and two at JMPT) from studies done at his office.*

*Dr. DeGeorge has now implemented a program to help other doctors gain more from their own practices.*

**Pam**

**W**hen Pam became a patient, I thought my dreams had been answered. It was one of the easiest reports of findings I have ever done and I think it took less than 4 minutes in grand total. Pam was so clear that she wanted to undergo corrective care that I felt like she was selling me on it. Pam seemed like she had just been waiting for someone to tell her the things I was telling her.

Pam was so excited that the very next day she brought her husband in for an exam. The report of findings for Pam's husband was even easier than the one on Pam. In fact, I said very little during the report. Pam was the one who did most of the talking. She expressively explained the red and black lines on the x-ray to her husband and insistently encouraged him to take corrective care. He agreed and we all walked out of the room together.

Pam was the talk of the office. She would talk to anyone she could about how great chiropractic care in our office was and about how grateful she was for the care. She paid on time each and every week. Three weeks later, Pam disappeared without a trace. What could we have done to chase Pam out of the office so blatantly? Did I say something wrong? Did I offend her? Her husband was still coming in and was becoming a reliable corrective care patient. I asked him, what could I have done? Is she ok? Did something terrible happen? Her husband explained, "It's ok doc, she does this with everything. She gets all excited and then just stops and moves on to the next great discovery. Don't be upset, you do a good job and she knows that." I was dumfounded but felt better knowing it was just the way Pam was. I reluctantly accepted that our clinical relationship was meant to be brief.

Just over six months later I was

adjusting and when I looked up, there was Pam. She was smiling and once again excited about chiropractic care. Pam was having some discomfort and told me that since I last saw her, she had seen 2 other chiropractors but had not experienced any pain. She was just trying out different doctors. Now, back in our office, she was convinced that we were the only ones who could help with both her musculoskeletal and kidney problems. Two weeks later, she was gone again. In fact, in the past 10 years, this pattern has tended to reoccur between one and four times each and every year.

## The Dabblers...

Have you ever wondered why the patient who was the perfect chiropractic patient and went flawlessly along with chiropractic philosophy just seemed to disappear after two weeks of care?

Why the person who wanted to be in the office 2 times a day and then bring their kids faded into the woodwork? Why the patient who referred 42 people during their first month of care just seemed to disappear?

A Dabblers quickly gets excited about anything that sounds like it will provide a new and important experience. A Dabblers in the chiropractic office is someone who is self-sold on whatever he/she believes the chiropractic service to be. They have reached the chiropractic phase of their life and look at it no differently from the person who purchases the home gym for \$800, uses it twice with vigor and then finds it is a great place to dry clothing and store hanging plants.

The Dabblers holds the potential to cause the doctor of chiropractic a great deal of frustration and confusion. For the unsuspecting chiropractor, the dabbler is the vision of the ideal patient and the doctor may end up blaming himself or herself for the disappearance of this person who seems to be the best patient. Just as the chiropractor is feeling secure with the clinical relationship, the dabbler has reached his/her euphoric plateau and disappears without a trace, leaving the doctor wondering what he/she could have done so wrong.

## Identifying the Dabblers Patient:

a. The Dabblers will quickly embrace the chiropractic approach of the doctors' office and believe it to be superior with minimal knowledge or exposure to it.

b. They will begin talking about the need for everyone to be under chiropractic care before they are educated and before the doctor suggests or looks for referrals from them.

c. The person seems instantly dedicated to becoming a lifetime patient of your chiropractic office.

d. The dabbler to various people in the office, including the doctor, staff, and other patients on each and every visit will repeatedly express one or more of these points.

## Paul:

The paramedic understood the big idea and took corrective care at the report of findings.

Within 4 days, his wife and child were coming in for care as well. Paul had been to other chiropractors but convinced us we were the best (which he decided on the first day) and became quickly committed to being a patient in our office for the rest of his life. By no, I knew better. It was fun watching the staff get excited because of Paul's enthusiasm. He immediately recruited the staff to bring him special information about health and discuss their chiropractic perspectives with him. He was quick to belittle the medical professionals he worked with and call them naive as to the power of the chiropractic adjustment.

We educated Paul and supported his excitement. The staff became vested in his care. Ironically, three weeks later, Paul stopped coming into the office. Paul's family came in for several more visits without him and then they were gone as well. Paul and his family were friendly, enthusiastic, and positive right to the end. Could we have done anything wrong? Did we chase them from the office?

Several months later, a coworker of Paul's became a patient. He was a referral from Paul and Paul's family. Jim was Paul's friend. Jim took corrective care with some hesitation and many questions and turned out to be a

good patient. Jim later explained to me that Paul got into just about everything and never followed through on anything. Now six months after Paul and his family stopped coming to the office, my suspicions were confirmed. We didn't do anything wrong, it was just Paul's personality to become quickly enthused and then disappear. Nevertheless, it was still a surprise when it happened.

Whenever a dabbler comes into the office, it is our hope that he/she will stay. Through years of frustration and understanding, I have come to see most of these patients for who they are and act accordingly once I have identified them. Dabblers can be good patients but are unlikely to undergo corrective care. They may make good maintenance people and can be a great source of referral if handled properly.

## Managing a Dabblers:

In managing a dabbler, there are several important things, which must be done properly. First, a realistic, effective, and thorough educational program must be maintained in the office. This is designed to leave no issue for interpretation by the person in 'his or her' own invented way.

The dabbler needs to be constantly re-directed in a polite manner to the specific points and issues in the current conversation, avoiding any loose interpretations or tangent lines of thought or expression. Second, do not take it for granted that they will stay. Their enthusiasm is a mechanism to please you as well as them and will serve to impede doctor-patient communication. The doctor must not be mesmerized or misled into having a false sense of security with this patient. Third, information with dabblers must remain simplistic and very basic. If it is anything other than simple and directed to each important point, it will get lost in a sea of expressionism. Last, have some faith. If you have done a good job and they leave, keep in mind it was bound to happen and don't be upset.

Dabblers still can be a great source of referral, make good occasional patients, and raise the spirit of the office, even when they are not active patients.

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