50 WAYS TO EXPLAIN CHIROPRACTIC SO PEOPLE GET IT

by William Esteb
When Frank Sinatra crooned the Cole Porter lyrics, 

“I’ve got you under my skin. 
I’ve got you deep in the heart of me,” 

he wasn’t describing an actual subcutaneous object or something in his left ventricle. He was merely using a couple of similies to communicate an abstract comparison. 

This, is like that. As in, “Life is like a box of chocolates.” 

Similies, metaphors, analogies, parables, allegories and fables are semantical devices that have been used by authors, writers, lyricists and storytellers for as long as there has been language. It turns out that if you want to communicate with greater effectiveness, you’ll want to acquire and use these figures of speech with both patients and prospective patients. That’s because we only learn something new in relation to something we already know. 

Combine metaphorical language with the old adage that “a picture is worth a thousands words,” and you further enhance your ability to communicate. That’s what you’ll find on the pages that follow. 

Here are some ways you can more effectively communicate chiropractic principles in a non-technical way. You can purchase these images (as I have) by searching the www.istockphoto.com website. (Refer to the Appendix for more details.) 

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Symptoms

If we make deposits into our “health checking account” we can make withdrawals as we need them.

If you can make deposits (good nutrition, exercise, proper rest, chiropractic adjustments, etc.) then you can make withdrawals (neglect, stress, pepperoni pizza, over doing it, etc.) Like your checking account, if you make more withdrawals than deposits, you get bounced checks and overdraft notices from the bank.

Not only are overdrafts expensive, it’s inconvenient and annoying. Sickness and disease are overdrafts on our health checking account.

Low back pain and pain down your legs? It’s an “overdraft” your body is sending you. Headaches? A bounced check. Numbness and tingling down your arm? A service charge from your health “bank.”

Many people begin chiropractic care because they’re overdrawn. They’ve got bounced checks and their health bank has levied some rather harsh fees. These penalties serve as a reminder that they haven’t been making adequate deposits to cover their withdrawals.

Getting a clear “audit” of your health account balance is the first place to start. That’s the purpose of a thorough examination. Then, you’ll probably need to make some immediate deposits into your account to get yourself out of the red. We call that Relief Care.

Then you have a choice. You can neglect your checkbook and suffer a relapse and more service fees later. Or, continue making deposits into your account, building up your balance and giving yourself some breathing room. Think of that as Corrective Care. The smartest option is to continue making still more deposits, opening up a savings account that can serve as a buffer you can call upon in moments of stress. We call that Maintenance or Wellness Care.
“May I?” you ask revealing a common rubber band, motioning to their index finger.

After you wrap the rubber band around their index finger a couple of times you’ll be getting a temporary inflammatory response.

“This is a lot like what happens when one of your spinal nerves are choked by misaligned spinal bones. See how it’s all red and inflamed? Some might recommend a simple massage.

(Rub their fingertip with deliberate one-way strokes)

“That doesn’t seem to do much. Perhaps we should try some physical therapy. Give that finger some exercise!”

(Demonstrate with your own index finger as if you were performing calisthenics with your index finger)

“Hmm. That doesn’t seem to be doing much. What else can we try? I know, how about some type of electrical therapy?”

(Create a buzzing sound as you move your own finger in small circles on theirs)

“How’s that helping?”

“May I suggest that we remove the nerve pressure?”
[Undoing the tourniquet] That’s what chiropractic adjustments do. Shall we get started?”

“Symptoms, like the check engine light on your dashboard, are merely a warning of something else going on. That’s why we often observe that ‘pain is rarely a problem. It’s merely an indication that some limit has been reached or that a change is needed.’

“What medications do is mask the symptom. That would be like putting a piece of black tape over the oil gauge. Or turning up the radio so you don’t hear the strange noise your engine is making.”
“I’m often asked why I adjust the upper neck when the pain is coming from the lower back.

“What we often see is that many low back problems are actually compensation reactions to problems in the upper spine. It’s a lot like accidently stepping on a dog’s tail. The problem is with his tail, but the bark—the symptom—comes out at the other end!”

(You might want to secure an actual smoke detector so you press the test button during your explanation.)

“Your headaches are a lot like the piercing sound made by a smoke alarm. (Press test button and talk over it.) The smoke is an indication of the presence of something far more serious: fire. Same thing with your headaches. Your headaches aren’t the problem, it’s a sign of a far more serious problem.”
“Think of this glass and the water in it as an indicator of how much physical, chemical and emotional stress you’re experiencing. It just keeps adding up: lack of sleep, coffee, stressful job, deadlines—the usual stuff. And it fills the glass almost to the brim. And then the season change. The pollen index shoots through the roof and puts your body over the edge as eyes become itchy, your nose starts to run and your capacity to accommodate the additional stress causes the water to overflow.

“By reducing stress to your nervous system you should be able to better accommodate the stress in your life and have greater margin. And while chiropractic care can’t eliminate stress, it can help you to better deal with it.”

(Patient Media offers a wall poster and coordinating postcard with an iceberg.)

“As we know and the captain of the Titanic learned was that most of an iceberg is below the surface. Your symptoms, like the visible part of an iceberg, merely indicate that there’s something else below the surface that needs attention. Turns out, it’s the part we can’t see that’s the most dangerous.”

http://www.patientmedia.com/posters/iceberg.htm
http://www.patientmedia.com/postcards/icepc.htm
The Nervous System

(Patient Media offers a 5” safety pin that makes this metaphor come to life.)

1. With the pin clasped together, hold it with the spring at the top.

2. “Up here is your brain, which generates nerve impulses to control and regulate your entire body, from your nose to your toes.”

3. Trace your finger down one side of the pin.

4. “Nerve impulses are sent down the spinal cord and out to every organ and tissue of your body.”

5. Trace your finger up the opposite side.

6. “So that your brain knows everything is working as designed, impulses are sent back up to the brain. That’s the definition of true health.”

7. Unclasp the pin.

8. “Many things can disrupt nerve impulses either to or from your brain. The moving bones of the spine are common culprits. When this happens, affected organs and tissues don’t work right and ill-health can result.”

9. Reclasp the pin.

10. “I locate and reduce these nervous system disturbances with safe and natural chiropractic adjustments. With restored nervous system integrity, health can return. Without drugs or surgery. Simple as that.”

http://www.patientmedia.com/reports/safetypin.htm
“Over a century ago, the founder of chiropractic made the observation that the profession of chiropractic is based on tone.

“Have you ever been at a stoplight in your car and hear, rather “feel,” the bass notes coming from the car next to you? Think of that as too much tone—like muscles that are flaccid, weak and out of condition. At the other end of the spectrum have you ever heard the squealing feedback from a public address system? That’s too much tone as well. In that case, muscles are tight and in spasm. What chiropractic care attempts to do is provide a healthy balance between both extremes.”

“When your nervous system gets overloaded, it trips the circuit, like the circuit breaker box in your garage. We call that subluxation.

“What happens if you don’t change anything and simply go out to the garage and reset the breaker? It blows again, doesn’t it? Same thing with your nervous system. Your job is to do your best to reduce physical, chemical and emotional stress in your life. Our job is to adjust your spine, reduce nervous system interference and permit a free flow of nerve communications between your brain and your body.”
“Like an electrician, we’re primarily interested in the integrity of the circuit. Since your nervous system controls your entire body, if you’re not enjoying good health, your nervous system is sure to be involved in some way.”

While not perfectly accurate, the pinched hose metaphor has been used for years to describe the effect of a compressive lesion. (Have an actual piece of garden hose in your report of findings area to demonstrate.)

“What happens to the water flow if there’s a kink in a hose? It’s diminished, right? That can happen to the nerve communications between your brain and body along your spine.”

If kinking it is too exaggerated for your sensibilities, then simply pinch a piece of hose with your thumb and index finger. Or get demonstrate nerve irritation with block of coarse sandpaper.

“If you’re choosing organic fruits and vegetables, well done. However, organic or not, if your refrigerator is unplugged, that is, your nervous system isn’t working properly, the extra expense of organic fruits and vegetables will be largely lost. That’s why our focus is on the integrity of your nervous system since it controls and regulates every aspect of your body.”
What could more graphically demonstrate how the nervous system controls every cell, tissue, organ and system of the body?

This is a metaphor to help explain the facilitative lesion, characterized by the rubbing, chafing or irritation of nerve tissue on hard bone or other nearby tissues.

“Like the conductor of an orchestra, your nervous system ‘orchestrates’ virtually all of the functions of your body. When an individual cell of your body or an entire system loses guidance from your nervous system, all bets are off. The drummer has the wrong beat, the woodwinds are playing too loud and the brass section is playing the wrong song! That’s why we interested in your symptoms but we’re focused on the integrity of your nervous system.”
Vertebral Subluxation

“Does a chain fail at its strongest point, or its weakest point? The weakest, of course. Same with your spine. Most people have an area of their spine that was the focal point of an early injury and that’s where stress shows up for them.

“What we often see in our practice is that when patients present with a long-standing spinal problem, while we’re usually able to help them, we’re rarely able to permanently ‘fix’ them. So, to support their spine and overall health, they find it helpful to plan on some type of ongoing care, based on their condition and stress levels. That could be once a month or even once a week. It just depends. So keep that in mind if this problem returns in the future.”

17. Install a dimmer switch in the room where you give your reports. (If you have fluorescent fixtures, consult an electrician for help in wiring the ballasts for proper dimming.)

During your report, when you review causes of subluxations, slowly dim the light a notch with each mention of a trauma, micro-trauma, repetitive motion, car accident, or mental and emotional cause of subluxations. Slowly dim the light until the room illumination is down to about half intensity.

Then continue with your report, allowing the patient to adapt to the lower light level, in the same way, his or her body adapted to reduced nervous system function until recently.

When it’s time to make your recommendations for care, explain your adjusting approach and then return to the dimmer switch, restoring the lights to full intensity while observing, “...so our approach is to help reduce subluxations and restore the integrity of our nervous system. Shall we get started?”

18. “Think of a subluxation is a kind of ‘traffic jam’ of your nervous system. It can slow down traffic in both lanes and takes awhile for things to get cleaned up and for things to return back to normal.”

19.
Whether tuning a piano or some other instrument, this taps into the concepts of tone and precision. “Not flat. Not sharp. Just right.”

(Stimulate conversations by having a champagne cork on your desk.)

“The soft popping sound that you may hear is just the release of pressure in the joint. Much like the pressure that is release upon opening a bottle of champagne or a can of soda.”

“Just like the sound that a suction cup makes when pressure is reduced when it is removed, sometimes the shifting of gas and fluid in a spinal joint can make a similar popping sound. However, you can’t judge the value or quality or value of an adjustment based on whether or not a sound is produced. In fact, some chiropractic adjusting methods don’t produce a sound.”
When parents are introduced to the idea of chiropractic care for their children, they often assume that their children or newborns will experience adjustments with the forcefulness that they receive. "And relax knowing that the amount of force needed to adjust a newborn or young child is no more than what you’d use to test the ripeness of a tomato."

"How long does it take for dental practitioners to change the position of teeth? In fact, it can take years. And that’s with the constant pressure from braces."

"We can’t rely on braces. Instead, we depend on a series of chiropractic adjustments that specifically target the misaligned spinal bone involved in the nerve interference. Adjustments provide a precise force at the right time and place to make spinal changes."

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"May I see your car keys?"

"Think of a chiropractic adjustment as a key, like this one, that simply unlocks the potential that is already there, built into your car by the engineers at, in this case, Toyota."

"I bet when you get into your car on a cold winter morning and your car starts up, you don’t pay homage to your keys. No! In fact, you’re thankful that the battery, starter and the entire electrical system was in good health and ready to take you on your way. Same with chiropractic adjustments. You are the hero, not the adjustment. You’re doing the healing, not the adjustment."
“Like the large amount of fuel that is used to get an airplane off the ground as it picks up speed going down the runway, your visits at the very beginning will be fairly intense. We’ll be seeing you three times a week during the early stage of your care.

“As we create some momentum for healing and you reach cruising altitude, like an airplane, we’ll be able to pull back on the throttle and reduce the frequency of your visits.

“By the way, have you ever heard of the term ‘touch and go’? It describes what pilots do when they practice take offs and landings. They take off, circle around the airport, touch down for a landing and then without coming to a complete stop, take off again and repeat the process.

“The reason why I bring it up is that we see many patients do a series of ‘touch and goes’ with their health; starting care, stopping care, starting care and stopping care and on and on whenever they have a symptom. They never really benefit from the efficiencies of reaching a cruising altitude and the only occasional visits necessary to maintain their health.”
“The early stages of your chiropractic care will be a lot like starting a new workout program at the gym. You may be stiff and sore. And then you’ll get stronger and stronger. After awhile, you’ll start looking better and feeling better. When that happens that’s when our human nature kicks in and we’re inclined to miss visits and kind of coast.

“When that happens, it’s only a matter of time before we’re on track to become a couch potato and go back to our old ways.

“Once we get through the initial phase of your care, we’ll be able to safely reduce the frequency of your visits and still maintain your overall health and well-being.”

“If you want to lose some weight, it’s going to take more than just skipping one desert. Same with recovering your health. It’s likely to take many visits over many weeks or months with each visit building on the ones before.”
“Do you know what the most popular diet of all time is? It’s the Yo-Yo Diet. Have you heard of it?

“The Yo-Yo Diet is when you resolve to make a change in your diet, start exercising, lose the weight and then return to your old ways of eating and not exercising, gaining back all the original weight, plus a little extra, prompting you to find another diet and then off you go, repeating the process.

I mention this because we have a few patients who take on chiropractic in the same way, starting, stopping, starting, stopping and they can’t figure out why their problem keeps returning. That’s why after you enjoy the relief of your symptoms, expect us to recommend ongoing chiropractic checkups to help maintain your progress.”
(The Road to Recovery chart offered by Patient Media depicts this process so patients can easily understand.)

“If you’ve ever ridden a roller coaster you know that at the beginning you’re manually taken up the first hill by mechanical means. Then at the top, the rest of the ride is merely coasting. Downhill.

Like chiropractic, the beginning of your care will require the most effort, with frequent visits designed to help you become symptom-free. And, if you choose to coast, at some time you’ll stop moving. This is when symptoms will often return. That’s when many of our patients will return to our practice and start over from the beginning. That’s why we recommend some type of ongoing supportive care to help avoid your original problem from returning.”

Simply put, the only way to coast is to go downhill.

“It’s called the Golden Gate Bridge because of the yellow-orange colored paint used to protect the steel spans and support cables. However, what most people don’t know is that the bridge is constantly being painted to protect it from the stress of salt water and the elements.

“When painting crews get finished at one side, they return to the other to begin the process over again.

“That’s why we recommend some type of ongoing maintenance care to help you accommodate the stresses in your life.”
(Patient Media offers the patch or fix concept in poster form and as a brochure.)

“Have you ever hit a pothole while driving in your car? Then you know not only how common potholes are, but how damaging they can be.

“Think of your current symptoms as hitting a pothole, putting your car out of alignment. Just like your car, your spine is out of alignment too.

“One strategy is to merely patch the pothole, filling it in with asphalt. By the way, how long does that last? Not long, right?

“That’s the thing, about patching a pothole or ‘patching’ your spine: it doesn’t tend to last. That’s why we recommend some type of ongoing maintenance or preventive chiropractic care.”

http://www.patientmedia.com/posters/patch.htm
http://www.patientmedia.com/brochures/patchbro.htm

One way to give the concept of a bone spur greater impact is purchase some dead coral from a store that sells aquarium supplies. Patients can feel the sharpness of the calcium, giving their X-rays greater significance.
Salvage an old rusty hinge and demonstrate the reduced range of motion and how adjacent pieces of metal tend to fuse together.

Show the phenomenon in which over time the lipping and spurring of adjacent bone surfaces join together to stabilize the malfunctioning spinal joint.

To mend a broken bone, it must be immobilized in a cast. In the same way, when a spinal joint is malfunctioning, the body senses the inflammation and begins depositing calcium salts as if it were mending a broken bone.
Find a bowling alley that will sell you an unusable 10-12 lb. ball. Bring it to your practice and place it on the floor in one of your adjusting rooms.

“Can you pick it up? I’d like to show you something.” (Many patients will need to be coached about how to lift something!)

“Okay, can you hold it straight out in front of you? Great.”

Instruct them to keep their arms parallel to the floor. Allow their arms to fatigue as you explain the bowling ball represents the approximate weight of their head.

“Notice how much energy is being used? It’s what people with a forward leaning head experience all the time.”

Explain this common postural distortion and its impact on the nervous system. Have X-rays standing by to show what this problem looks like. Or photographs of people with a forward head carriage. Urge them to keep an eye out for people with this condition and encourage them to come in for an examination.

Like a hair part in which hair goes in one direction or another, muscles become accustomed to supporting the spine in a particular way. Changing your hair part takes time in the same way retraining the muscles that support your spine take time.
Think of the muscles that support individual bones of your spine as being in a constant tug of war. If both teams on either side are evenly matched, you’ll be able to turn and bend in normal ways. However, if one team is stronger, they can cause spinal bones to rotate toward the stronger side. Retraining and strengthening the weaker side requires a series of carefully spaced spinal adjustments.

Posture Structure Motion

“When the foundation of your house shifts and develops cracks, what happens to the doors and windows above? Naturally, they get stuck and don’t work correctly. That’s the same thing that’s happening with your pelvis. One hip is higher than the other and that’s affecting how your spine is able to support the weight of your head.”

Visit a store that installs tires and secure an example of a discarded tire with signs of a misaligned front end. Give it a good cleaning and lean it up against the wall in an adjusting room.

“What’s the tire for?” ask curious patients, surprised to see a tire in your office.

“I use this to show the effects of misalignment and long-term neglect. See how the tread on this side of the tire is worn down to the cord? We see this sort of distortion in the spine when there’s been long-term misalignment. Now, you can always buy new tires for your car, but you can’t buy a new spine! Instead, the best that we can do is attempt to retrain the muscles that support your spine so each bone is in better alignment.”
“What do you want to make sure you do when you buy new tires for your car? Get a front-end alignment. That way they wear more evenly and last longer. That’s true for your spine as well.”

“Just like a tree that has adapted to the prevailing wind, your spine has adapted to misalignment and the effects of gravity. This is why we recommend a chiropractic checkup for children. That way, they are less likely to suffer from some of the long-term problems we see in adults. In fact, we have a saying in chiropractic, ‘as the twig is bent, so grows the tree.’”
“Besides your gender, your posture is the first thing people notice about you. Does your posture reveal that you’re confident, certain and self-assured? Or does it disclose that you’re fearful, unsure or timid? Your posture concerns us. Not because it can sabotage your next business deal, make your clothes fit poorly or stall your golf game. We’re interested because it profoundly affects your overall health.”

“The individual bones of your spine must not only protect delicate spinal nerves, but they must permit normal turning, bending and movement. Like your spine, if these rowers don’t move properly, in coordinated unison, they won’t move efficiently through the water.”
Pick a day to wear a surgeon’s mask to your practice.

“Notice anything different today?” you ask. “So I have a question for you. Is the mask for the benefit of the patient or the surgeon?”

“And a follow up question for extra credit. How large is a germ compared to the openings in and around the mask that permit a surgeon to breathe?”

“Germs are not the enemy. Germs constantly surround us. The real issue is how well is your immune system, controlled by your nervous system, working to protect you? That’s why many of our long-term practice members come in on a regular basis. It’s interesting that they often observe that they don’t tend to get all the bugs that go around.”
Instead of photographs, having three-dimensional objects at your disposal to communicate these concepts can produce even greater impact. Obviously, you can’t place the Leaning Tower of Pisa in your adjusting room or an iceberg where you deliver your report of findings! So, sometimes images will have to do.

There are many stock photography resources on the Internet. Simply search on the phrase “royalty free stock photography.”

Istockphoto.com is a popular, easy-to-use resource with an excellent search feature and a variety of sizes and resolutions for each image.

You can generally download watermarked “comps” of each image for free. If you wish to purchase an image, you must first set up an account and buy “credits” which are then applied to purchase the usage of the image. Then, you simply download to your computer. (Read the licensing information so you know how you may use the image.) Normally, the larger the image or greater its resolution, the more expensive.

Hope you find this helpful and enjoy the benefits of greater patient understanding!