

How to Incorporate a “Laser Pain Center” Into Your Existing Practice

By Gary Huddleston, DC

As chiropractors, and even clinics with physical and massage therapists, we are always interested in accomplishing two major things in our practice, and these two points of concern stand true with everyone in every practice situation.

First, we want to give the absolute best treatment we can and hope for an excellent return through increased health and well-being for all of our patients.

Second, for our dedication, knowledge, and work, we expect to be paid and compensated a fair and just amount. Without a doubt, there is no variance from either of these concepts.

Over the years, the chiropractic profession has seen a myriad of new treatment modalities, techniques, and get-rich gimmicks introduced into our profession. Many of these literally have nothing to do with chiropractic, while others have such a huge price tag on them that implementation is often too expensive or difficult to see a return on investment. The manufacturers of this equipment or technique will often tell you how easy it is to charge an extra \$100 to \$250 for this special treatment or modality, and your patients will be beating your door down to pay you cash. Believe me, it doesn't often work out this way in the real world or in our practices. Everyone is price conscious and concerned about what an extra treatment costs, no matter how great it is supposed to be. When you add this extra benefit cost as quoted by the manufacturer to the price of your chiropractic adjustment, you're often seeing a cash office calls out the door to the tune of \$125 to \$300. Remember when some companies were telling doctors to charge upward of \$500 cash per treatment for spinal decompression? We all know what happened to that golden cow. While our treatment may be worth these amounts, getting it on a regular basis may be difficult.

There are many time-proven, even decades- and generation-proven methods that have withstood the test of time—flexion-distraction, correct spinal decompression, various therapy modalities, acupuncture, and of course, without a doubt, chiropractic adjustment.

Not all chiropractors want or even need to add extra income sources to their practice, but many of us do. However, that income source needs to be a method that can produce consistent



positive patient outcomes, be easy to apply, doesn't require a second mortgage on your house to purchase, and is not just a frustrating gimmick that will only be viable for the short term.

Our two clinics have been doing laser therapy for some time with excellent results, as have many of you. Just recently, we upgraded to our own class IV laser that we designed, but again, you can implement a laser pain center into your practice with any reputable laser—class III or class IV—and any laser manufacturer that you are comfortable with and getting good results. In fact, many of you may already have an appropriate laser, so that expense has already been eliminated.

When deciding to integrate a laser pain center, do a bit of groundwork. First, check with your local state board just to make sure there are no conflicts. Second, come up with a nice

name such as, for example, The Laser Pain Center at Johnson Chiropractic Clinic, or Greenville Laser Pain Relief at Johnson Chiropractic Clinic.

Many doctors we have spoken to actually have stand-alone buildings or separate locations with a separate staff for their laser pain centers. You will need to check with your local municipality about proper zoning restrictions, as well as if a pertinent or separate business license is required.

You may also need to talk with your malpractice carrier to check on your insurance in regards to any issues that may surface with them when expanding your clinic and services. Even though you may have a separate entity operating out of your clinic by name, it may still fall under your chiropractic license and your malpractice insurance will cover it as well. Again, check with your insurance carrier.

We have actually opened a separate entity in addition to our existing chiropractic offices along with a separate name. This allows easy access for the patient as well as informing potential patients that they actually have a choice or a combination of choices for their healthcare needs. It is imperative that you can differentiate the two with patients, or be able to offer both services during the same visit. We have noted that exceptional patient response can be accomplished when combining the proper chiropractic adjustment or spinal decompression with laser therapy. This is a very strong one-two punch that will benefit your patient tremendously.

Separate advertising and marketing materials have been established for both the chiropractic practice and the laser pain center, and these informational handouts are given to patients when they come into the office. Often, patients have heard of the laser pain center, seen it online, or saw our sign and inquired about it before ever setting up an appointment. Many potential patients are curious about the laser pain center and ask for a consultation, which we do for free. We explain exactly what we do in the laser pain center, what they can expect, and how many visits we recommend. Normally, most potential patients will actually sign up for both chiropractic care and laser therapy for each visit, which of course is a higher fee. However, we also have a large number of patients who, for whatever reason, do not want chiropractic care and opt only for the laser treatments. By offering both types of service, you expand your patient base. It is interesting to note that many MDs or orthopedists will refer patients to us for laser therapy but not for chiropractic.

We have found over time that combining chiropractic care with laser therapy is the fastest way to better health. We have also found that patient compliance is much better when using laser therapy. When we did patient accounting, nearly every patient who agreed to our 12-visit laser therapy protocols followed through to the end and then scheduled for follow-up and well-

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ness treatments.

While a 12-visit treatment regimen sounds short in today's chiropractic report of findings, we have found that excellent response has been noted and that the patients like the quick protocols, fast service, and the

results. We also have nearly eliminated the dogma that “chiropractors keep you coming back forever.” While longer treatment plans may be needed for some or recommended by others, this program has worked well for us. We have found that resistance to 12 visits is nearly nonexistent, and patients refer heavily due to the results they receive, the lower cost, and the fast period of treatment. With our program, this keeps ensuring new patients and referrals.

Normally, we only treat one major area of concern with laser during the 12-visit course of therapy. We have seen that once patients start getting rapid results, they will often start asking, “My back is doing so much better. Can you do my right shoulder and left knee while here?” As noted, we treat one major problem with laser and try to stay with that one condition for the 12-visit program. Of course, we will adjust other areas as needed, but the laser is used for one specific area of treatment. Treating multiple areas can possibly diminish the body's healing potential due to lack of specification and thus treatment becomes too random.

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- Can you opt out of Medicare?
- Can you collect cash from Medicare patients without billing Medicare?
- Are you allowed to give free services to uninsured patients?
- Do you know when not to use code S8990?
- Can you opt out of HIPAA?

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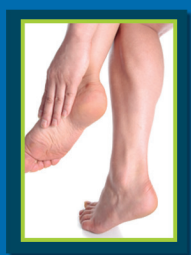
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LASER

Plus, treating multiple body parts can take much more time than planned or allowed, especially if the laser you are using needs longer treatment times to deliver enough joules of energy to be therapeutic. We simply suggest to complete treatment of the primary concern, and then we'll talk about and address other issues following completion. Many patients will complete the 12-visit protocol and then start another program for another body part. Again, you can set the 12-visit treatment plan as stand-alone laser or combine it with your excellent chiropractic treatment and any other modalities or rehabilitation that you want. Everyone has his or her own treatment model, so just simply combine that model with laser.

Besides in-house literature, we also have separate signage on our offices that advertises and states our laser pain center. These signs also promote curiosity and are a great source of new patients.

We also have sent out scientific-based literature to fellow medical doctors and surgical centers, and now we have gotten many referrals from a large orthopedic group that suggests laser therapy as the first-line response to see if surgery can be delayed or even avoided. One patient was scheduled for cervical surgery for a disc condition with numbness down the right arm. The patient was told not to have manipulation but to try laser therapy. After the third visit, the pain was gone in his neck and he was getting feeling back and had improved use of his right arm. He happily canceled surgery, is still coming in for laser, and is doing well. While not everyone may have this dramatic of a result, many do and will.

A good website is also needed, and we set up a laser pain center-specific website that explains our presence as well as what we do, pricing, appointments, and all other pertinent information. We actually built our own website, but many good companies out there can do it for you. Many patients will search for treatment for their condition, so having a good web presence is paramount.

Laser therapy has an ongoing therapeutic effect. As more treatments are administered, the snowball principle comes into play—continued treatment increases the healing effect more with each visit. Like with any rehab or treatment regimen, not everyone will respond 100% due to age, the chronic nature of the problem, and wear and tear. However, keep this in mind and relay it to your patients. Just a 25% decrease in pain through laser therapy will increase quality of life by 50%, which is an excellent trade off.

Whether you decide to add a laser pain clinic into your existing practice, or just want to add laser therapy as an adjunct to your practice, you are creating a win-win situation for both you and your patient.



Dr. Gary Huddleston is a certified instructor for motion adjusting, flexion-distraction methods, and spinal decompression. He has worked for decades in the professional sports, film, and entertainment industry. He also owns Accuflex Tables and maintains a practice.
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