

Whenever There is a Fall



I was finishing up work in my office on a Saturday morning when the phone rang. It was young man named Ben calling from the beach in Grand Haven, Michigan. Ben had been playing volleyball on the beach and during the game his low back went into spasm. Ben indicated that his regular chiropractor was on vacation. He had been systematically going through the phone book trying to find a chiropractor who was working on a Saturday morning. Ben reached me as I was about to head home.

I agreed to wait in my office until Ben could get there. When Ben arrived an hour later he gave me more details. He had a history of low back pain and muscle spasm for which he received regular chiropractic adjustments. That morning while playing volleyball he had jumped up to spike a ball over the net and he had fallen backwards on his buttocks in the sand. It was not a hard fall, but his low back had immediately gone into spasm. It was Ben's hope that after a quick adjustment his weekend would not be one of sitting on a couch with ice packs.

I have a rule in my practice I have learned from experience. Whenever there is a fall there is an x-ray or other image. I will not treat a fall patient without an image.

I explained this to Ben and he was highly resistant to the idea and attempted to convince me to just adjust his back, but reluctantly he agreed. I gently treated the surrounding soft tissue and applied an ice pack. Feeling better he left my office and headed off to the imaging center for his x-ray. Frankly, I never thought that he would do it.

I have had many patients, usually because of the cost, object to or outright refuse to get an x-ray. The cost of x-ray's is nothing compared to the consequences of a traumatic injury resulting from an unstable bone or joint. If they refuse to get the x-ray I cannot treatment them.

The results came back by Monday and confirmed that Ben had compressions fractures to the lower three lumbar vertebrae. The fracture at L5 was the worst and if I, or another chiropractor, had adjusted him he could have been badly injured or paralyzed.

Whenever there is a fall, there should always be an x-ray or another form of imaging.

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