

# In pursuit of evidence: The pathway from In-Practice experiences to respected research.

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## Introduction

It is commonly understood by Chiropractors that our profession is in constant pursuit of high-quality research to support what we see in practice every day; that in order for chiropractic care to be seen as a credible approach to health and wellbeing by our governing bodies and the broader community, the profession must produce measurable, reproducible evidence in the form of peer-reviewed and published research papers based on traditional research methods. While this is all true, there is another element of credible evidence-gathering that has a growing support base and an important role in the global chiropractic research community, and the Australian Spinal Research Foundation (ASRF) is taking a leading role in facilitating this type of research.



The ASRF is the largest chiropractic research funding organisation in the world and has, since its establishment in 1977, funded 210 research projects at a cost of around AUD\$2.7M. The role of the Foundation within the profession is to remain a leader in facilitating the investigation of how chiropractic contributes to community health and well-being, and therefore our mission is *'to facilitate research that furthers the understanding and development of chiropractic care'*.

To this end, the Foundation is constantly exploring ways to contribute to the production of evidence that is relevant to the broader profession and to the chiropractors that we serve, as well as their communities. An increasingly tenable way to produce research that is translatable across multiple audiences is the humble case report, which we recently discussed in our blog article *Flipping the Evidence Hierarchy – Why Case Reports Matter for Chiropractic, where we explored whether randomised controlled trials, clinical trail's and other such studies are the only valid evidence.* (1)

Case reports in chiropractic are not a new concept - many have been published to date. However, the perception across the chiropractic and medical professions alike has generally been that case reports are 'weak' evidence, that they do not contain robust data and are thereby not valid as legitimate evidence towards the effectiveness of chiropractic care. Increasingly however, case reports are being heralded as a way to create a stepping-stone of sorts, allowing the health care outcomes seen in practice by chiropractors every day to contribute to, and strengthen, the growing body of valuable chiropractic research.

In a recently published *Review, Towards Greater Recognition of Case Reports in the Evidence Hierarchy*, the authors examine a broad range of literature that highlight the efficacy of case reports, and the importance of chiropractors using them to contribute to the existing evidence base. *'It is time that chiropractic stood up, announced, and established the fact that there is considerable evidence in the chiropractic literature and support the call for recognition of refereed case reports.'* (2)

The ASRF agrees with this assertion, and has seen an increasing need for a coordinated, supportive approach to encouraging chiropractors to produce case reports. We see one of the roles of case studies as providing a voice for those practitioners who experience and witness amazing health outcomes every day in practice. These everyday stories are often overlooked or uncaptured, in amongst the busy lives of practice members. Yet, it's these very stories that offer a real-life view of chiropractic care, and build a foundation of evidence that supports more clinical methods, thus painting an overarching view of the benefits of chiropractic for communities.

While many practitioners see the value in contributing their findings, the task of collecting, collating and writing up the reports is often seen as an arduous and impractical undertaking. To address this, the Foundation has developed the *ASRF Case Report Project*, whereby we are asking chiropractors to contribute valuable insights that will then be turned into case reports by the ASRF. And there are several things that make this project truly unique and exciting.

To begin with, this is the first time that the ASRF has funded a research project that is being undertaken by the Foundation itself, as opposed to providing funding for external researchers and organisations. This is important, in that the direction of the project is able to be clearly defined and aligned with the ASRF's Research Agenda, which was developed through an in-depth global consultation process spanning more than 70 individuals, colleges and associations. The Vision of the ASRF is *'a clear understanding of vertebral subluxation'*, and it is through our Agenda that we are able to focus on the role of subluxation in the areas of resilience, adaptability, stress and immunity. This has influenced our parameters for the ASRF Case Study Project, and we believe that by empowering chiropractors to share their stories in a way that is simple and easy, that the project will produce a good deal of tangible evidence in support of the vision held by our tribe.

Additionally, our approach to this project allows us to filter the submissions through our Clinical Advisory Panel and Research Committee before approval and publication, in line with our world-renowned two-stage approval process. This is a way to ensure the credibility of the case studies that will emerge, as well as their alignment with our Agenda, resulting in a collection of high-level studies for publication. We know that there are incredible stories and transformations that take place in practice all of the time, and we want to ensure that we can present them in a way that is seen to be of great relevance and value to the various audiences they are aimed at.

On a practical level, the ASRF will provide participants with a unique ['ASRF Case Study Project Guide'](#), which gently guides chiropractors through a simple 5 step process, designed to make the inclusion of patient information as easy as possible. Participants will use existing patient notes to provide relevant information, based on instructions within the Guide. This can even be done via voice-recordings, which adds another level of simplicity to the process. The Guide comes complete with spine diagrams and consent forms, and the most exciting part is that the ASRF will write up all information, turning each submission into a Case Study, with the contributing chiropractor as First Author.

As with our Research Agenda, it is the desire of the Foundation to emerge from this project with quality research that is going to serve the chiropractic community, by building confidence, certainty and clarity in our great profession. In this inaugural year, funds for the project were raised during Spinal Research Hero Month, through the generosity of event Sponsors as well as

those practices that participated in fundraising activities. We are grateful to those who contributed, and we look forward to receiving what we can only imagine to be ‘amazing’ stories and insights from chiropractors participating in the project. We are excited to walk alongside you on the pathway to some much-anticipated research.

Interested in participating? Find out more or register here <https://spinalresearch.com.au/research-agenda/asrf-case-study-project/> .

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## References

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