Dull aching back pain takes the fun out of a dream vacation while sciatic nerve pain keeps the best sleeper awake. Certainly a primary care appointment could be the first option to either rule out or diagnose a significant underlying health issue; however, carrying home a prescription for pain management versus a referral to a chiropractor may be considered old school in some circles.

Today, we first seek assurance that our pain is not due to a significant underlying medical condition. Once cleared, we have the option of searching for ways to avoid consuming medications or surgery. Imagine a network of services under one umbrella – supported by insurance companies. It could look like this: a primary care appointment rules out underlying medical conditions, then the primary care physician provides the patient with their options including a referral to a chiropractor or acupuncturist within the same healthcare facility. When a relationship is established between a physician and a chiropractor, pain is managed differently. Spinal adjustment along with active care is one component, as are more pointed conversations about overall health and pain management, potentially without the use of opioids and surgery.

Fulcrum provides insurance companies with quality, credentialed providers so they can offer their members more options including conservative care.

“We are now expanding our footprint into North Dakota and other Midwestern states, providing high quality, patient-centered care – using conservative care,” Fulcrum CEO Tabatha Erck said. “Our legacy product, ChiroCare, is a chiropractic network that is over 30 years old. Fulcrum also offers products for acupuncture, physical, occupational and speech therapies.”

Further, Erck said Fulcrum strives for affordable, quality care where clinic needs are met with care designed to deliver the Triple Aim. The Triple Aim is a component of the Affordable

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“We want to treat patients so they can get back to what they need to do; to get out of bed; to improve their overall quality of life.”

Essentia Health Chiropractor Dr. Allen Hager

Dr. Hager’s practice is positioned on the same floor as his internal medicine colleagues. He has seen feeble patients enter his rooms – and leave with a smile. Physicians notice.

“Chiropractors are educated in a holistic model. We are trained to stand on the fact that our bodies have an innate ability to be healthy on its own. Without allowing that to happen,” he said, “the body becomes ‘dis-eased’. We have to eat well; we need regular exercise. We need to safely stress our bodies for our bones to repair and to allow our muscles to be healthy and strong. We need a healthy mind.”

Although conservative care and prevention can have a positive impact on many health concerns, there are still areas in which the best results require the use of medications. “There are times when our body is in need of particular medications or antibiotics, such as when a patient has diabetes,” he said.

Dr. Hager’s work setting is an example of an integrated system, where a spine center combines the expertise of physical medicine doctors, primary care doctors, physical therapists, neurologists, pediatricians, nurses and occupational therapists. Working together, they can contribute to an improvement in the quality of life for most patients.

“Research helped me to see the depth and breadth of knowledge integrated care could have in health and wellness. By bringing all practitioners together to focus on the patient, we can together achieve results while managing an overall cost reduction in healthcare in our nation,” Erck said.

Fulcrum is hired by the insurance companies to align services between the healthcare facility and conservative care, such as chiropractic, acupuncture and physical therapy.

“The expectation is collaboration ensures patients are not falling through the cracks,” Erck said. “When a patient is seen for back pain, our goal is a back and forth communication and sharing of information between the primary provider and the conservative care provider; it provides better outcomes and improves ongoing dialogue between the care providers and the patient. Our conservative care providers document medical concerns, for example a high blood pressure reading, and communicate these results back to primary care. This integration and collaboration between primary care and physical medicine providers have been shown to improve outcomes and the quality of care patients receive,” Erck said.

To encourage this coordination of care and a relationship between primary care and conservative care providers, Fulcrum looked at the successes of ChiroCare and developed ways to bring that to other professions.

Today, Fulcrum offers a variety of credentialed networks focused on delivering the Triple Aim.

Fulcrum provides each provider within its networks a report card to see how they measure against their peers. The report cards may show a provider an opportunity to improve their patient care experiences as well as their collaborative efforts. Their reports also found on their ChiroCare website.

Fulcrum describes their influence as a non-profit organization; they are not an insurance company, nor are they a healthcare facility. Instead, ensure network providers provide care utilizing high quality outcomes.

“Within Fulcrum’s networks, we developed the Chiropractic Care Centers of Excellence for those providers who strive to meet stringent standards. These providers are currently part of a study called ChiroFirst in which they are a portal of entry for those seeking care for back pain in a program designed to be affordable while providing high satisfaction and great outcome,” Erck said. A list of these providers can be found on their ChiroCare website.

ChiroCare Centers of Excellence provide high quality, patient-centered care through regular use of outcome measurements. “We have learned that by measuring outcomes, we are changing healthcare,” Dr. Hager said. “We are no longer simply asking how patients feel or about their pain level. Instead, we are asking, ‘What did you do today?’ We are talking about functional presence and our treatment plans focus on improving function. We want to treat patients so they can get back to what they need to do; to get out of bed; to improve their overall quality of life.”

Further, he said, “Our mantra is to ‘take back your health.’ The only person to take care of you is you. You get to make the decisions. No one will be there to take care of your health other than you. At the end of the day, you make a conscious decision based on good evidence. Your chiropractic care is a part of that.”