

# Report on Chiropractic Outlook for 2017

**CHIROTOUCH** PERSPECTIVES



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Unlike any year in the last decade, 2017 brings with it a host of uncertainties: a new administration headed by a Washington outsider, possible repeal or significant changes to the Affordable Care Act (ACA), changes to Meaningful Use, upheaval in the insurance industry, and complete ambiguity about how/if/when changes will be made to how doctors are paid.

In regards to the anticipated repeal of "Obamacare" (the ACA), one chiropractor stated, *"With the potential collapse of Obamacare (or at least huge changes), chiropractors have the opportunity to become Wellness Leaders in their communities. We can show people a better way to care for their health than to rely on insurance - integrated, holistic, and natural practices that provide options and truly affordable care without the need for insurance."*

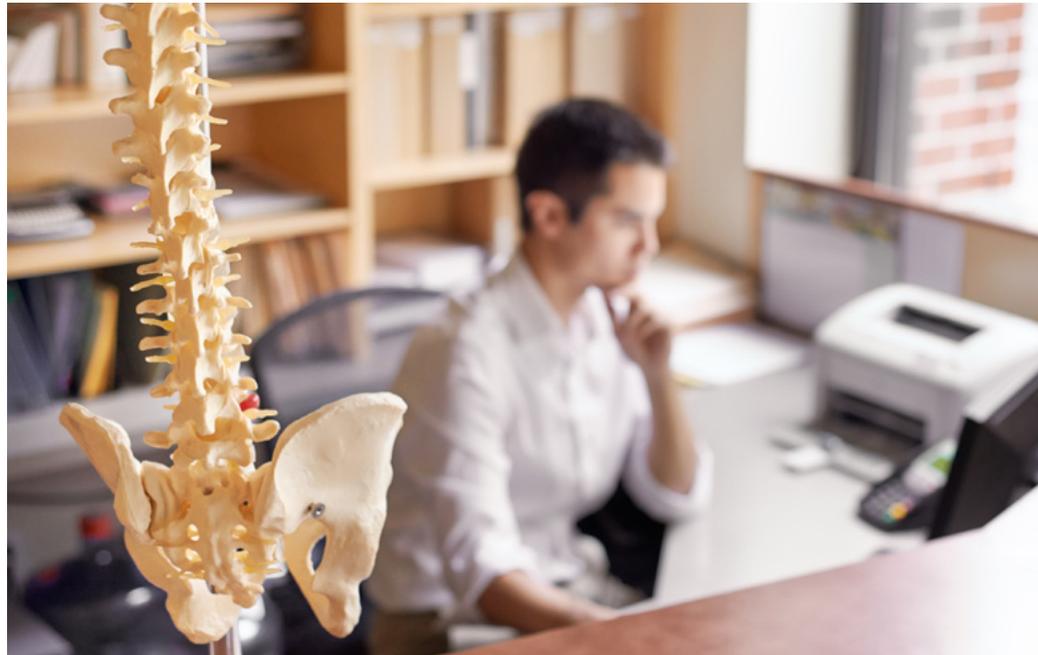
And so we felt this to be the perfect time to take a snapshot of the profession and see just how chiropractors across the country are feeling about their patients, practices, and the profession in which they serve.

Toward this end, ChiroTouch conducted a random survey of over 500 chiropractors nationwide. Our mission was simple: to reveal leading trends in chiropractic and help chiropractors use this information to measure and improve upon their business.

## Optimism Prevails

Despite all of the potential upheaval looming in 2017, doctors of chiropractic (DCs) were overwhelmingly positive about the coming year. Two-thirds of the DCs surveyed described their outlook for 2017 as either very optimistic (23%) or cautiously optimistic (44%). This contrasts with only one in five DCs who said they were either somewhat or very pessimistic about the coming year. Reasons cited for an optimistic outlook included practice growth, expanded services, possible repeal of Obamacare, and the public embracing overall wellness care outside of their traditional primary care. Reasons for pessimism included changes to third party payer reimbursements, regulatory uncertainty and increasing competition.

DCs were equally bullish on their prospects for practice growth in 2017. More than half (53%) said they expect their practice revenue to grow in 2017 while only 14% expect a decline in practice revenue.



## But DCs Still Have Concerns

Despite an overwhelmingly positive outlook, the DCs surveyed still have some concerns. Topping the list of concerns is practice profitability with nearly half of all DCs surveyed saying this was a “major concern” heading into 2017. Other concerns that are top of mind with DCs include insurance reimbursements, practice growth, attracting new

patients and avoiding audits.

When it comes to insurance, 43% of chiropractors are concerned about receiving insurance reimbursements, with 32% being concerned with complying with 3rd-party payer requirements. This makes sense as it seems like the cap on what insurance will cover only goes down, let alone the percentage of rejected claims many practices experience.

In addition, about one third of DCs listed complying with 3rd-party payer requirements as a

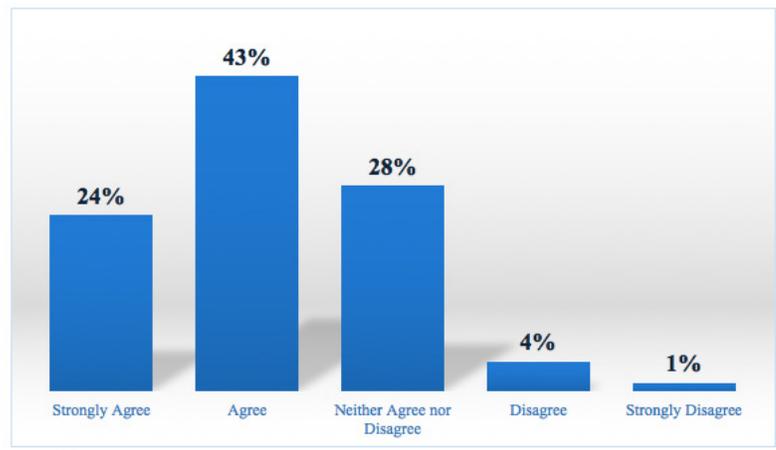
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*“Practice profitability tops the list of DCs concerns for 2017”*

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chief concern and two-thirds of respondents fully expect that private insurance companies will eventually require Meaningful Use Certification. This was not unexpected, as the saying “Where Medicare Goes Private Payers Follow” exists for a reason. And finally, in regards to insurance, 34% are concerned about avoiding audits which is up slightly from a similar study conducted in January 2016. Nearly every practicing chiropractor has either had a post-payment audit, or knows a colleague who has.

*Chiropractors believe that insurance companies will require Meaningful Use Certification in the future...*



## Personal Time versus Practice Efficiency

Just over 1 in 4 DCs expressed they wanted more personal time while just 1 in 5 were concerned with practice efficiency. This is interesting in light of the fact that running a more efficient practice is one of the easiest ways for DCs to free up time for personal pursuits. Another surprise is that less than one-quarter

said maintaining HIPAA compliance was a concern, a number quite low considering all the HIPAA laws being changed in light of mobile technology and the increases seen in hackers holding healthcare data hostage.

Yet another interesting statistic: just over one-third of DCs believe that Meaningful Use and MACRA/MIPS will have a high impact on their practice in 2017. This seems to reflect that DCs are still associating Meaningful Use and MACRA/MIPS with Medicare reimbursement and perhaps not seeing the longer term, big picture of pay-for-performance and interoperability. [Or maybe they just think it’s going to be repealed?]

## Opportunities and Challenges Facing the Profession

Last but not least, DCs were asked what they feel the greatest opportunities and challenges facing the profession in 2017. Interestingly, what may have been perceived as a challenge, others saw as an opportunity, such as the repeal of ACA/Obamacare and the potential shift towards overall wellness & drugless healthcare. To this point, one chiropractor pointed out: “*With the potential collapse of Obamacare (or at*

least huge changes) chiropractors have the opportunity to become Wellness Leaders in their communities. We can show people a better way to care for their health than to rely on insurance - integrated, holistic, and natural practices that provide options and truly affordable care without the need for insurance."

Practice growth and growth of the Chiropractic profession overall were also listed as opportunities in 2017.

Chief among the challenges facing Chiropractic in 2017 is insurance reimbursements. Many DCs feel they work just as hard if not harder and have less profit due to bureaucracy and overhead caused by insurance companies and regulations. This left some feeling apprehensive and

pessimistic about the future and the prospect of remaining profitable. Some DCs even went so far as to say they felt that growth for the profession overall was being limited due to increased competition from other wellness and healthcare providers.

Fragmentation or lack of unity across the profession was another frequently mentioned challenge. One chiropractor wrote, in all-caps, "STOP THE IN-FIGHTING AND COME TOGETHER AS ONE VOICE."



Some DCs felt the profession suffers from a lack of clarity surrounding its missions and goals, lack of solidarity and leadership. Others voiced concerns over ethics noting that as reimbursements decline, there is more tendency for providers to take ethical shortcuts.

In conclusion, it is evident there are both challenges and opportunities that will come with the new year. Some are not unique and have been with the chiropractic profession for decades, and others are a result of a changing of the guard in Washington DC. Ultimately, and regardless of where one stands in view of the various challenges and opportunities the profession will see this year, the true measure of success – for every practice and the profession as a whole – is found in patient health. And that, indeed, is something all can agree on.

*Regarding their practice outlook for 2017, Chiropractors anticipate that their revenue will...*

