

# Where You Start Matters

## A retrospective study on Neck Pain Care Pathways & Costs

Based on "Neck pain care pathways and costs" by David Elton, DC & Meng Zhang, PhD (2022)

### Chiropractor (DC)

#### The "Non-Prescriber" Route

##### Common Treatments:

Manipulation & Active Care.

##### Downstream Risk: **Lowest**

Significantly lower rates of advanced imaging (MRI), opioids, injections, and surgery.

##### Focus:

Conservative management first.

### Primary Care (PCP)

#### The "Medical" Route

##### Common Treatments:

Medications (NSAIDs, Muscle Relaxants).

##### Downstream Risk: **Moderate**

Often leads to early radiography and referrals.

##### Imaging:

Early use of Radiography (X-Ray).

### Specialist (OS)

#### Orthopedic Surgeon

##### Common Treatments:

Advanced Imaging & Invasive Procedures.

##### Downstream Risk: **Highest**

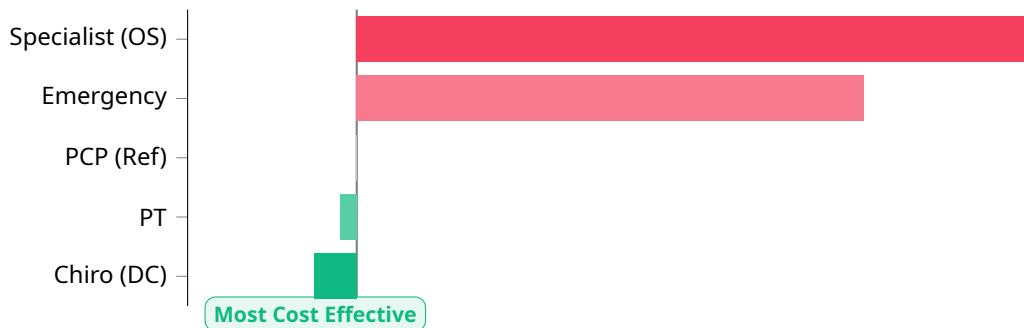
Highest rates of MRIs, opioids, spinal injections, and surgery.

##### Cost Impact:

Significantly higher episode costs.

## The Cost Reality: Relative Episode Costs

Compared to Primary Care (Baseline \$0)



## The Chiropractic Advantage

- **Lowest Total Episode Cost:** Care pathways initiated by a Chiropractor consistently demonstrated lower total costs compared to Primary Care, Specialist, and Emergency Medicine pathways.
- **Risk Avoidance & Safety:** Chiropractic patients had the lowest exposure to "second-line" services. This means significantly fewer prescriptions for opioids, fewer MRIs, and fewer invasive procedures.
- **Guideline Concordance:** The chiropractic pathway aligns most closely with clinical guidelines for neck pain, prioritizing conservative manual therapy and active care.