

# Chapter 7

## The Chiropractic Practitioner

The first section of the 2009 Survey of Chiropractic Practice inquired about the responding chiropractic practitioner. Survey data were reported only from licensed doctors of chiropractic who indicated they were practicing 20 or more hours per week. Therefore, those chiropractors who received the survey and were not currently practicing chiropractic (either retired or working as researchers and/or educators) were asked to return the survey without completing it. Almost eight percent (7.7%) of the surveys returned indicated that the respondent was not currently in practice. The next question asked practitioners to report the hours per week they spend in patient care practice. Data from those who marked 9 or fewer (3.4%) and 10-19 hours (4.9%) were not included in this report as they were considered to be in part-time practice.

Nearly half (49.8%) of full-time chiropractors work 30-39 hours per week, while one-quarter (24.4%) work 40-49 hours per week (Figure 7.4). These proportions are essentially the same as in 2003 (Figure 7.3) and may indicate that the trends seen over 1991, 1998, and 2003 have stabilized. While about the same proportion of practitioners are working 30-39 hours per week, substantially fewer are now working more than 50 hours weekly (Figures 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4).

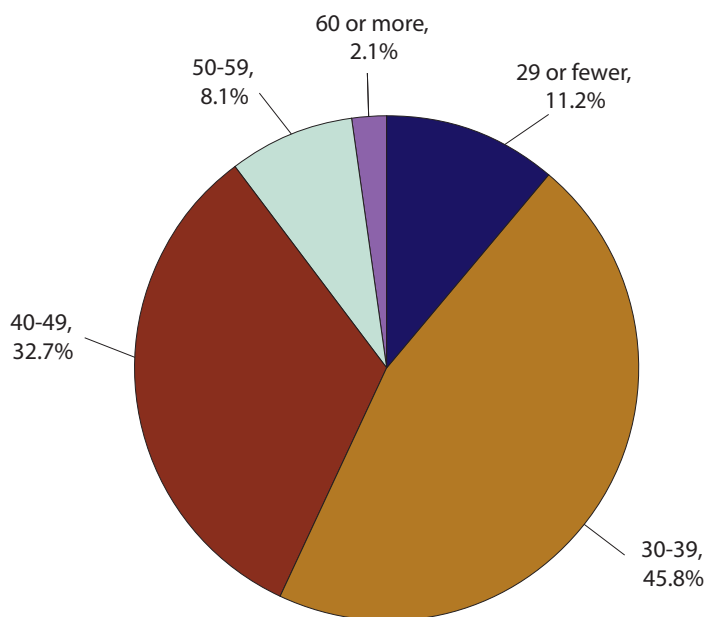


Figure 7.1 Practice Hours per Week (1991)

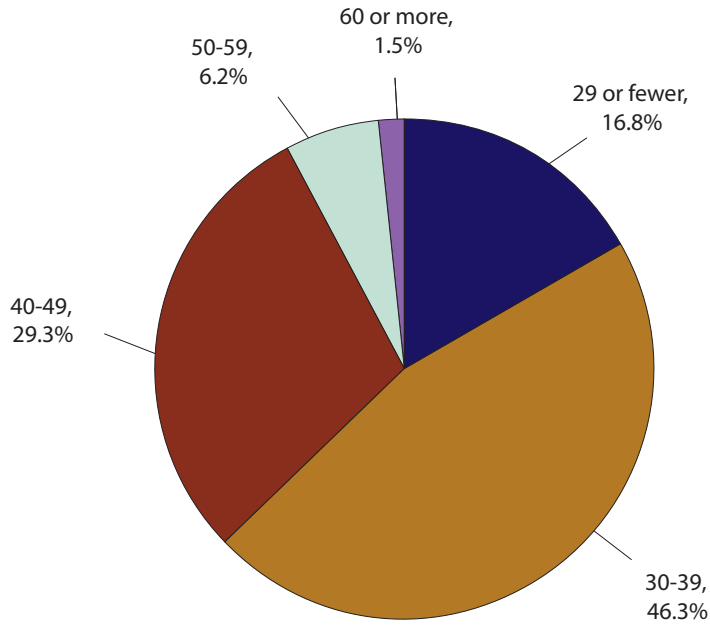


Figure 7.2 Practice Hours per Week (1998)

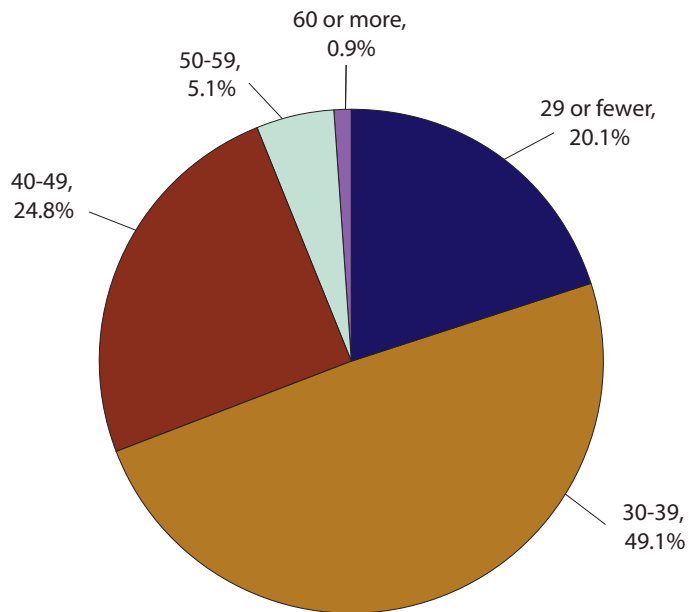


Figure 7.3 Practice Hours per Week (2003)

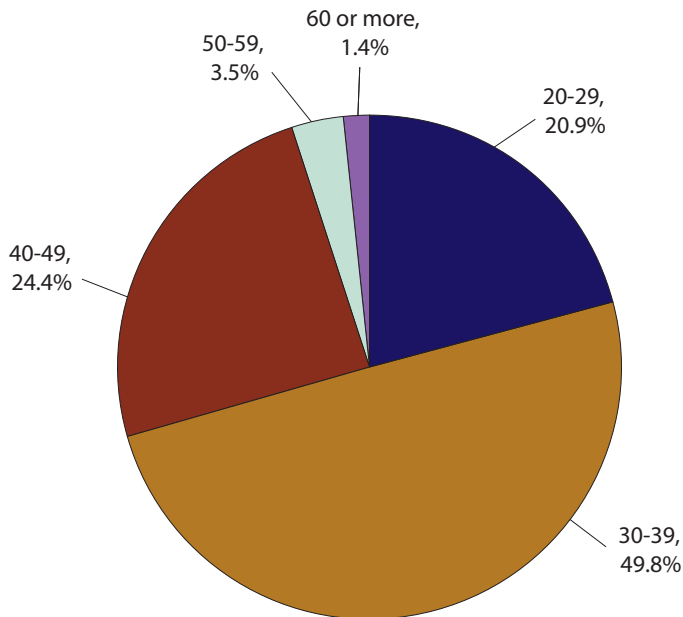


Figure 7.4 Practice Hours per Week (2009)

## Personal Demographics

In the *Demographic Data* section of the survey, respondents answered questions concerning personal characteristics such as gender and ethnicity.

### Gender

- According to the 2009 Survey of Chiropractic Practice data, 77.6% of chiropractic practitioners are male and 22.4% are female. In comparison to the NBCE 1991 Survey of Chiropractic Practice, the percentage of female chiropractors has increased approximately 10% (Figure 7.5).

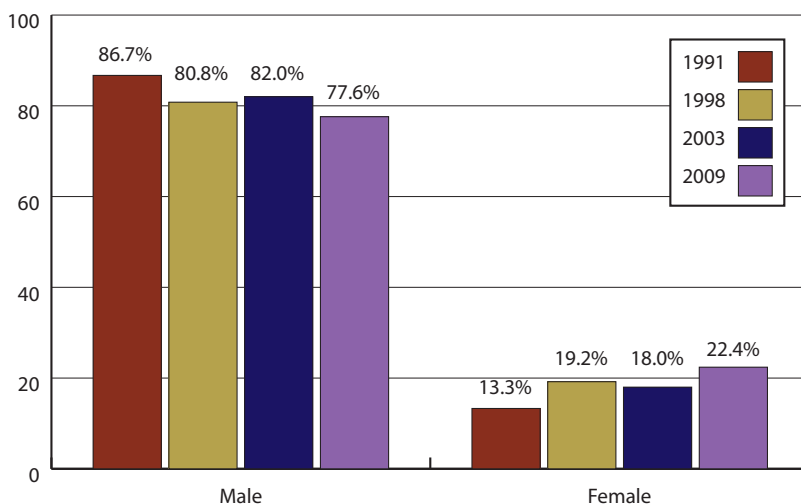


Figure 7.5 Practitioner Gender

## Ethnicity

- When inquiring into practitioner ethnicity, the 2009 Survey of Chiropractic Practice allowed respondents to mark all categories that applied and also to write in an additional ethnic origin. Because of these differences, no direct comparisons can be made with the previous surveys. This survey found that 84.9% of respondents chose Caucasian as a single ethnic origin. This continues the downward trend since 1991.
- Asian, African American, Hispanic, Native American, mixed, and other ethnicities comprise the remaining 15.1% (Table 7.1).

Ethnic Origin of Respondents	1991	1998	2003	2009
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.8%	1.8%	2.7%	2.6%
Black or African American	0.5%	0.6%	0.8%	0.9%
Caucasian	95.5%	93.5%	91.5%	84.9%
Hispanic	1.6%	1.7%	2.2%	1.0%
Native American	0.2%	0.8%	0.6%	0.4%
Other	1.2%	1.6%	1.5%	1.2%
Mixed	—	—	0.7%	9.0%

**Table 7.1** Ethnic Origin

## Level of Non-Chiropractic Education

The *Demographic Data* section also asked participants to indicate the highest level of non-chiropractic education they have attained. The level of pre-chiropractic education has steadily risen since 1991, revealed in the increased number of chiropractors with bachelor's degrees as shown in Figure 7.6.

- Ninety-three percent of chiropractors hold a post-secondary academic degree.
- Almost two-thirds (63.6%) of chiropractic practitioners have bachelor's degrees, 6.3% have master's degrees, and 4.9% have doctorates in non-chiropractic fields.
- Compared to the 1991, 1998, and 2003 survey data, the proportion of chiropractors with bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees has steadily increased.

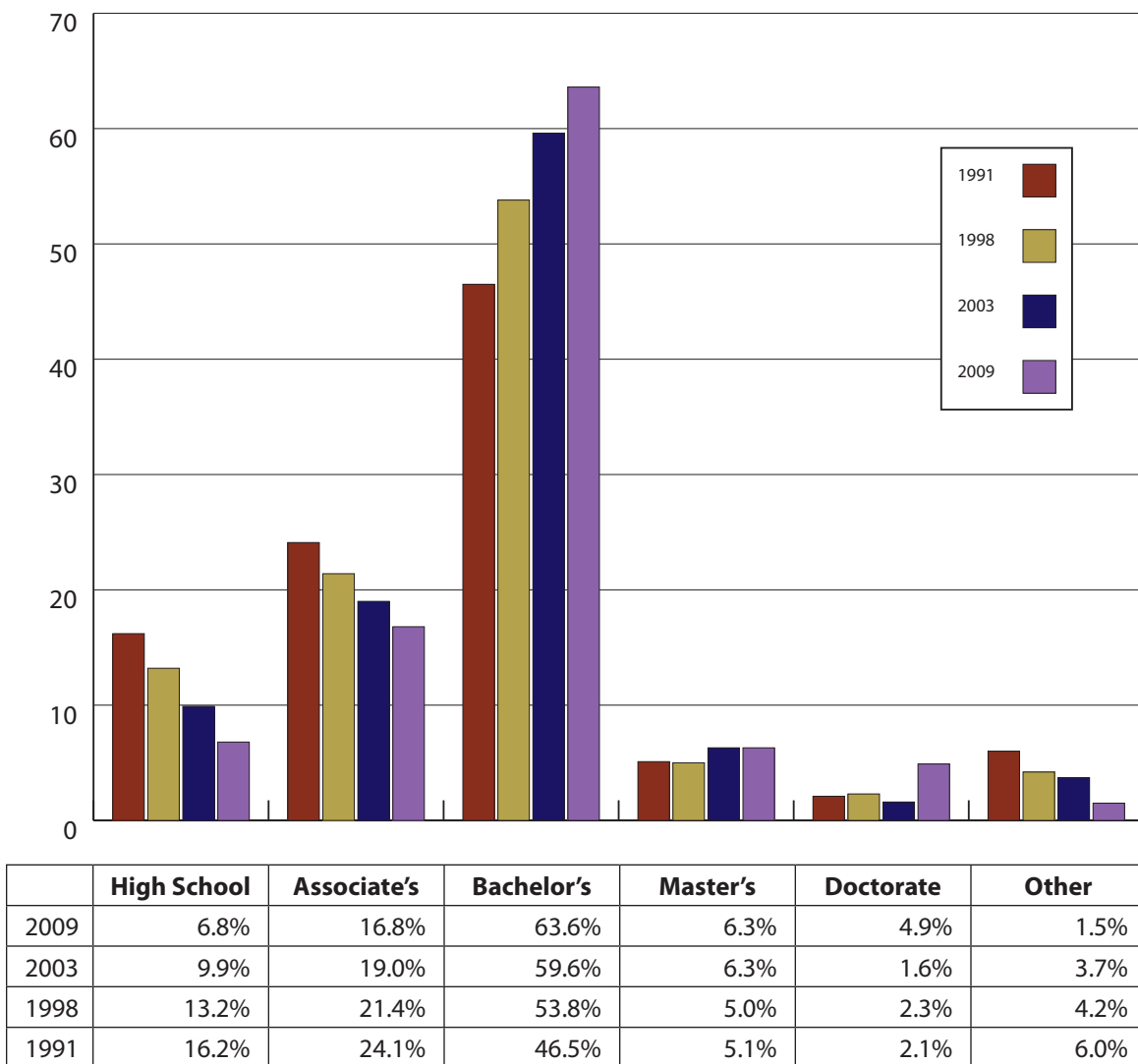


Figure 7.6 Non-chiropractic Education

### Specialization

Regarding specialty training and board certification, respondents were asked to indicate if they hold post-graduate diplomate status through a specialty board, council, academy, college, or association.

- Of the survey respondents, 12% have attained diplomate status or the equivalent, 30.4% indicated that they have worked toward diplomate status, and the remaining 57.6% have no diplomate status or equivalent specialty certification.

## Chiropractic Colleges Represented

Respondents were asked to indicate the college from which they received their Doctor of Chiropractic degree. More than one-fourth (26.6%) of respondents received their chiropractic degree from one of the three Palmer colleges and 15.3% received their Doctor of Chiropractic degree from one of the two Life colleges. Only those institutions with at least one respondent in 2009 are listed. Since 1991, new colleges have been added to this list<sup>1</sup> (Table 7.2).

College	1991	1998	2003	2009
Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College Toronto, Ontario, Canada	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
Cleveland Chiropractic College, Kansas City Overland Park, Kansas	3.9%	3.5%	4.3%	4.1%
Cleveland Chiropractic College, Los Angeles Los Angeles, California	3.5%	2.9%	1.8%	1.2%
Life Chiropractic College West Hayward, California	1.3%	2.6%	3.7%	3.6%
Life University, School of Chiropractic Marietta, Georgia	9.0%	12.3%	11.1%	11.7%
Lincoln College of Chiropractic Indianapolis, Indiana	no data	0.6%	0.9%	0.5%
Logan College of Chiropractic Chesterfield, Missouri	8.0%	8.4%	7.7%	9.4%
National University of Health Sciences Lombard, Illinois	11.6%	9.2%	10.4%	7.6%
New York Chiropractic College Seneca Falls, New York	7.4%	7.3%	6.7%	7.9%
Northwestern Health Sciences University Bloomington, Minnesota	4.5%	4.5%	5.9%	5.5%
Palmer College of Chiropractic, Davenport Campus Davenport, Iowa	27.7%	22.3%	21.3%	21.6%
Palmer College of Chiropractic, Florida Campus Port Orange, Florida	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.5%
Palmer College of Chiropractic, West Campus San Jose, California	2.2%	3.7%	3.5%	4.5%
Parker College of Chiropractic Dallas, Texas	0.7%	3.1%	4.3%	6.4%
Pennsylvania College of Chiropractic Horsham, Pennsylvania	0.8%	0.7%	0.4%	0.1%
Sherman College of Chiropractic Spartanburg, South Carolina	2.9%	1.7%	2.4%	2.3%

**Table 7.2** Chiropractic Colleges Represented

<sup>1</sup> “No data” in place of a value for particular institutions in Table 7.2 denotes data were not obtained for that institution at the time of the survey. “N/A” denotes the program had not conferred the D.C. degree when data were obtained.

College	1991	1998	2003	2009
Southern California University of Health Sciences Whittier, California	6.6%	7.5%	7.2%	4.7%
Texas Chiropractic College Pasadena, Texas	3.5%	4.3%	3.4%	3.5%
University of Bridgeport, College of Chiropractic Bridgeport, Connecticut	N/A	0.2%	0.5%	0.6%
University of Western States Portland, Oregon	3.2%	3.7%	3.0%	3.9%
Other	2.8%	0.5%	1.0%	0.1%

**Table 7.2** Chiropractic Colleges Represented, continued

## The Chiropractic Work Environment

The *Work Environment* section of the 2009 Survey of Chiropractic Practice investigated several current topics regarding the nature of chiropractic practice. This time, the section inquired about hospital staff privileges and treatment of military personnel, community size of the practice location, number of patients seen weekly, the use of radiography, and inter-professional referral patterns.

### Hospital and Military Practices

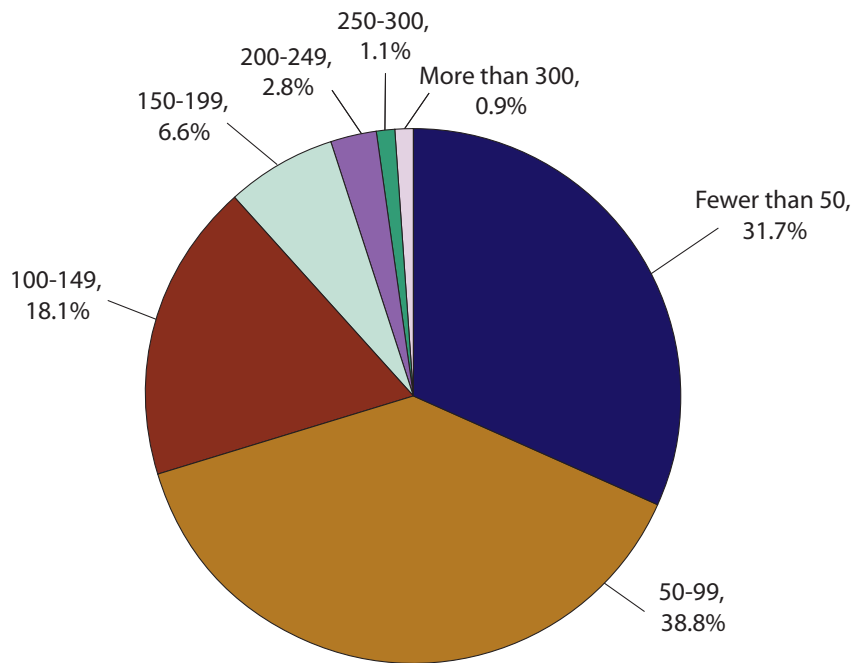
- A small, but significant portion (6.9%) of practicing chiropractors reported that they hold staff privileges at a hospital. This group has been growing steadily since 1991 — with 4.9% in 1991, 5.2% in 1998, and 6.0% in 2003.
- Another small group (4.4%) is currently employed under contract to provide chiropractic care to active or retired military personnel. This is the first time this question has been asked.

### Practice Location by Community Size and Use of Radiography

- Almost forty percent (39.0%) of chiropractors reported that their office is located in a city, 24.7% practice in a suburb, and 20.4% practice in a small town.
- Only 15.9% of respondents described their practice location as a rural small town or a rural area.
- Almost sixty percent (59.4%) of chiropractic practitioners take radiographs in their offices; 6.9% of those use digital imaging equipment.

### Patient Workload, Gender, and Ages

- The largest group of chiropractors (38.8%) treat between 50 and 99 individual patients each week, 31.7% treat fewer than 50, and 18.1% treat 100 to 149 patients. More than 11% (11.4%) reported that they personally treat more than 150 individual patients each week in their chiropractic practices (Figure 7.7).



**Figure 7.7** Number of Patients per Week (2009)

- Responding chiropractors estimated that females account for 60.7% of their patients. This distribution has been essentially unchanged since the 1991 NBCE Survey of Chiropractic Practice.
- Data from the current survey indicate that the percentage of patients under 17 years of age has increased since the 1991 survey but is about the same as in 1998 and 2003 (9.7% in 1991, 16.3% in 1998, 18.2% in 2003, and 17.1% in 2009). The current survey, like the 1998 and 2003 surveys, asked respondents to differentiate between the percentage of youngsters in their practice who were 5 years of age and under (7.7%) and those who were between 6 and 17 years old (9.4%).
- The rank order of patient age categories has not changed over the past 18 years. The highest percentage of patients is still in the 31-50-year range (29.0%), followed by 51-64-year-olds (22.8%), 18-30-year-olds (15.7%), and those 65 or older (15.4%) (Figures 7.8, 7.9, 7.10. and 7.11).

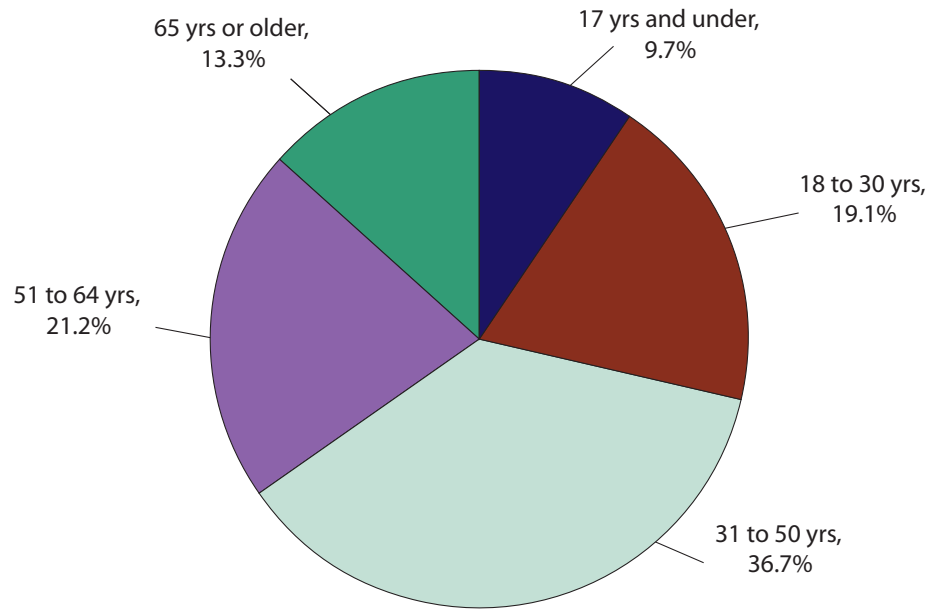


Figure 7.8 Patient Age (1991)

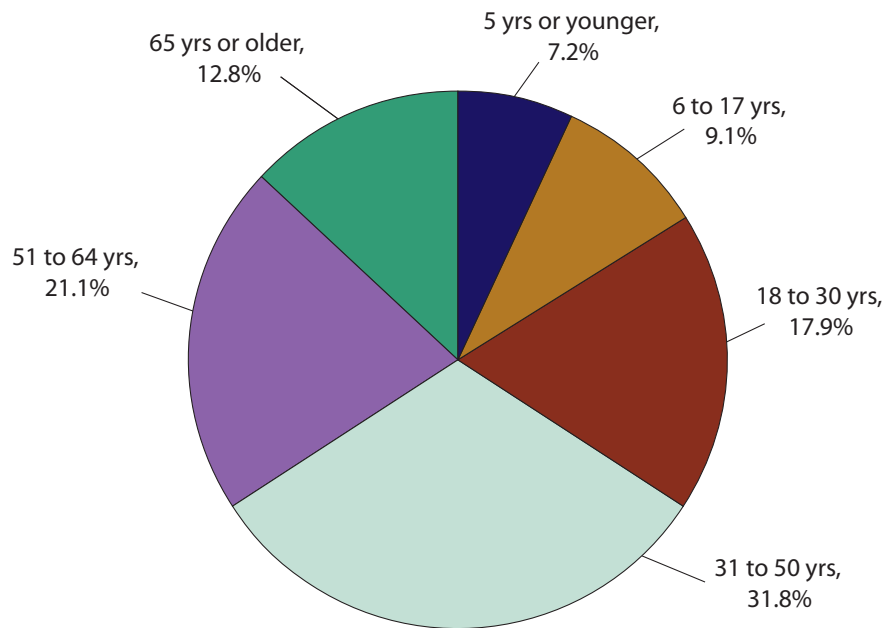


Figure 7.9 Patient Age (1998)

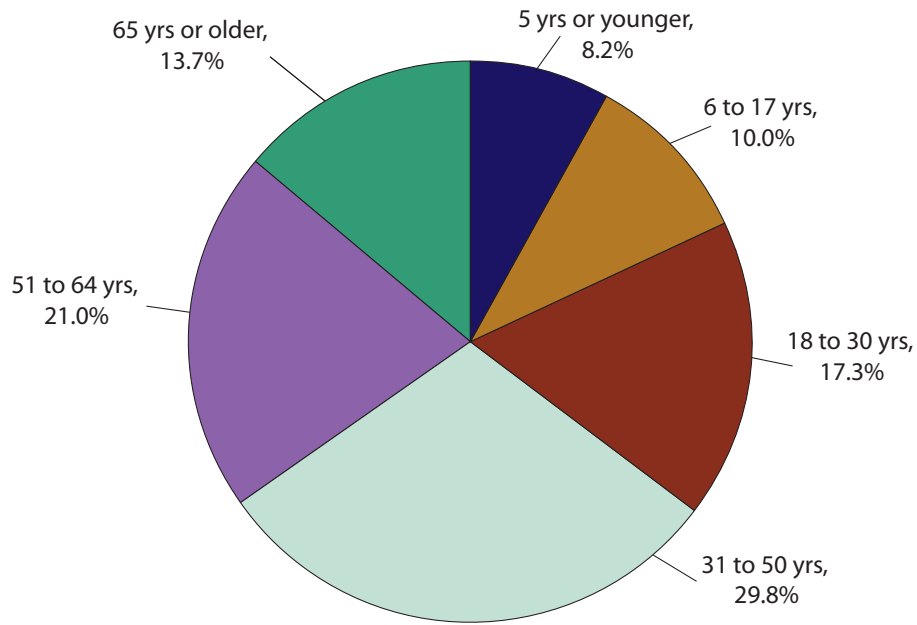


Figure 7.10 Patient Age (2003)

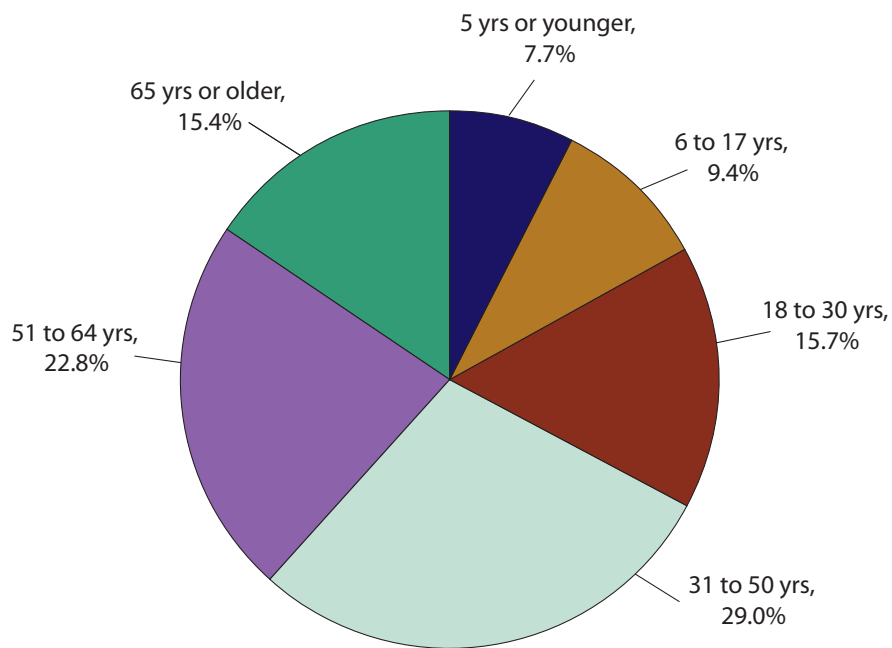


Figure 7.11 Patient Age (2009)

## Referrals

In the *Work Environment* section of the 2009 Survey of Chiropractic Practice, participants were asked to specify the frequency at which they received patient referrals from other health professionals and/or made patient referrals to other health professionals in the past year. Compared to the 1998 survey, the 2003 and 2009 surveys contained an expanded list of health professions and a revised rating scale (Figures 7.12, 7.13, and 7.14). Nearly all respondents (99.3%) indicated that they had made referrals to other health professionals and 98.3% reported receiving referrals of patients from other health professionals in the past year.

- Massage therapists and family practitioners referred the most patients to chiropractors.
- Chiropractors most frequently referred their patients to massage therapists, family practitioners, and orthopedic surgeons.

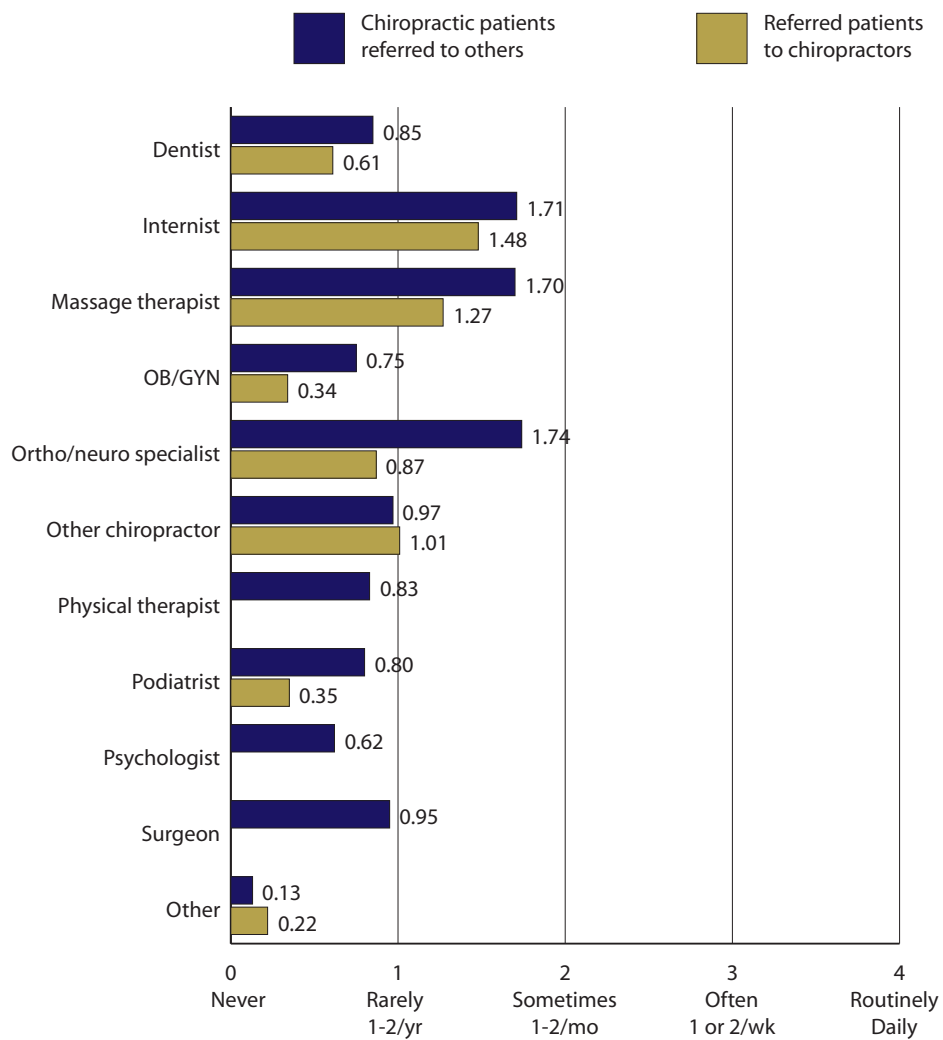


Figure 7.12 Frequency of Patient Referrals (1998)

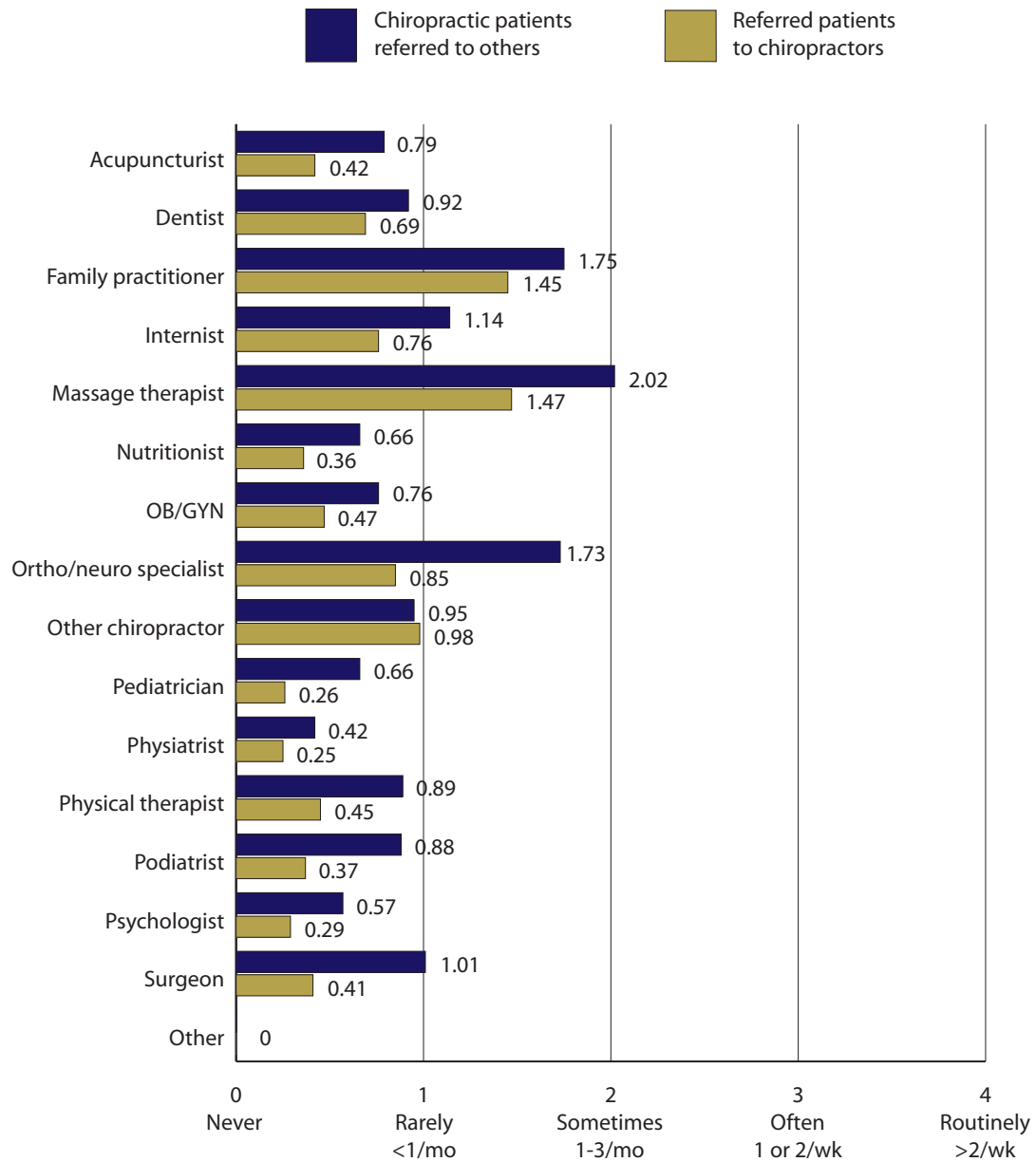


Figure 7.13 Frequency of Patient Referrals (2003)

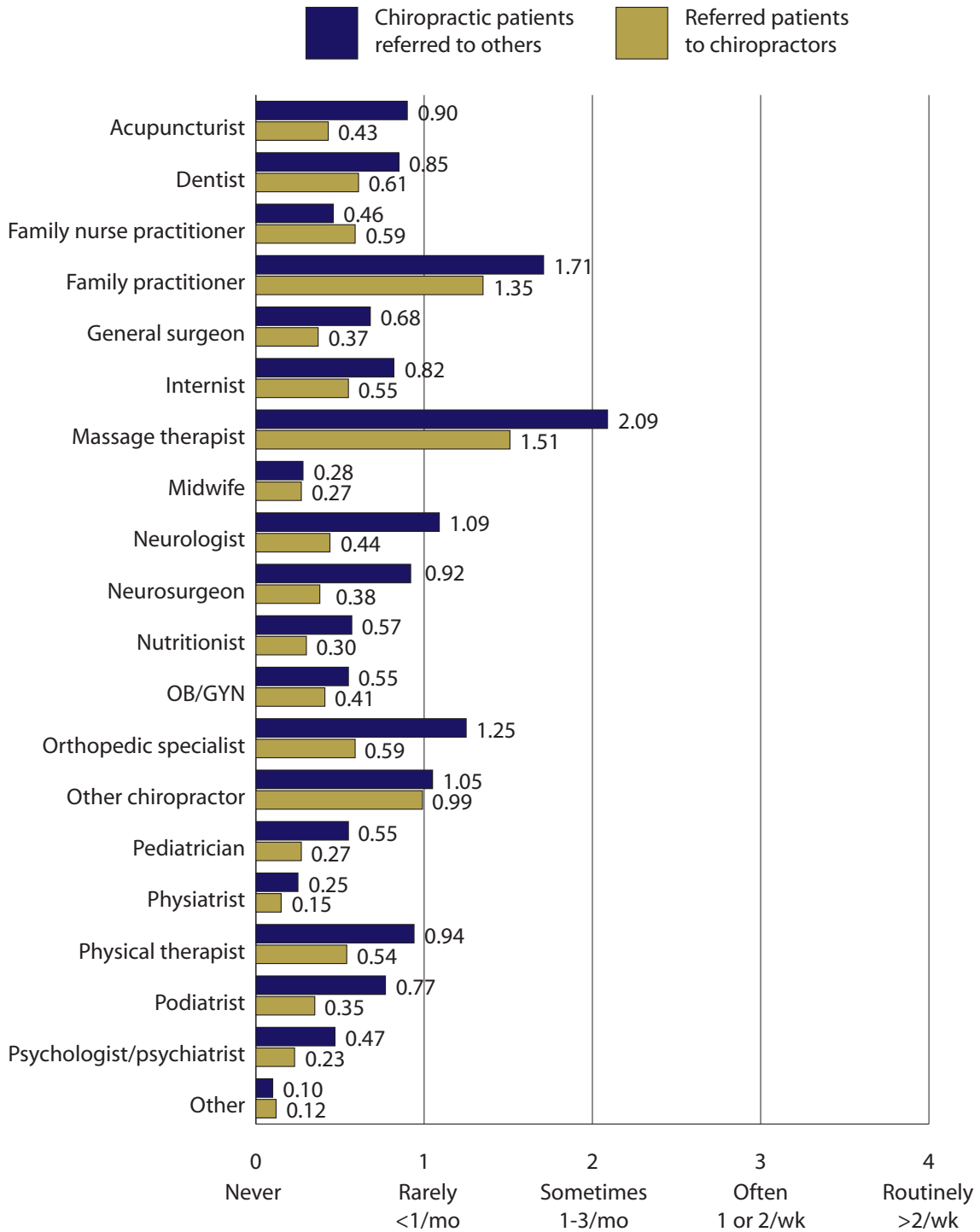


Figure 7.14 Frequency of Patient Referrals (2009)

## Experience and Orientation

The 2009 Survey of Chiropractic Practice also addressed length of time in practice, pre- and post-licensure training, continuing education hours, and components of chiropractic practice.

### Years in Practice

The trend over the past 18 years has continued, with the portion of practitioners in practice more than 25 years increasing to 24.7% in 2009. As in 2003, a small portion of respondents have been in practice fewer than five years (10.6% in 2009 and 10.2% in 2003), and about half have practiced for more than 15 years (51.1% in 2009 and 47.5% in 2003).

Years in Practice	1991	1998	2003	2009
Fewer than 2 years	4.1%	7.0%	1.9%	2.2%
2-4 years	14.2%	11.3%	8.3%	8.4%
5-15 years	57.1%	46.6%	42.4%	38.3%
16-25 years	24.6%	25.2%	32.1%	26.4%
More than 25 years		9.9%	15.4%	24.7%

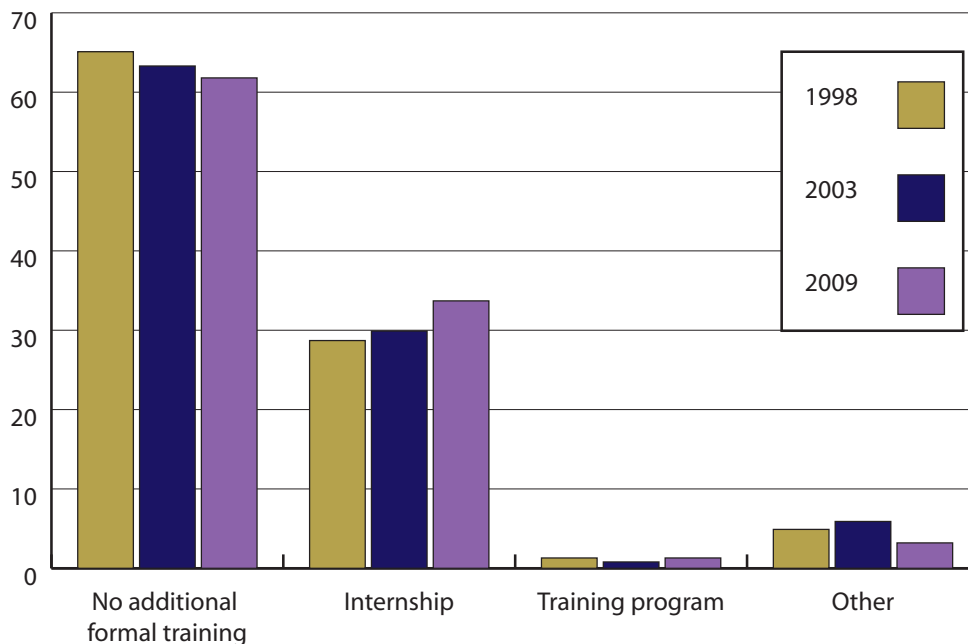
**Table 7.3** Years in Practice

### Clinical Orientation

The 1998, 2003, and 2009 NBCE survey respondents were asked to describe their pre- and post-licensure clinical training by selecting from lists of options. While the 1991 survey included the questions on post-licensure training, it did not include questions about pre-licensure training. For pre-licensure training, respondents were asked what professional orientation they had received beyond college experience. Concerning post-licensure clinical training, respondents indicated the level of training they received in their first field practice setting (Figures 7.15 and 7.16). The 1998, 2003, and 2009 responses to the questions on pre-licensure training showed a continued slow decline in the portion of chiropractors with no formal clinical training after graduation and before licensure. The responses to the post-licensure training questions revealed that more practitioners participated in associateships and fewer had no additional formal training in their first post-licensure field practice experience.

**Pre-licensure**

- In 2009, 61.8% reported no additional formal pre-licensure training compared to 65.1% in 1998 and 63.3% in 2003.
- A third (33.7%) had participated in a preceptorship or field internship prior to licensure compared to 28.7% in 1998 and 29.9% in 2003.
- Only a small portion (1.3%) had fulfilled a state-mandated training program as additional pre-licensure training, similar to 1.3% in 1998 and 0.8% in 2003.

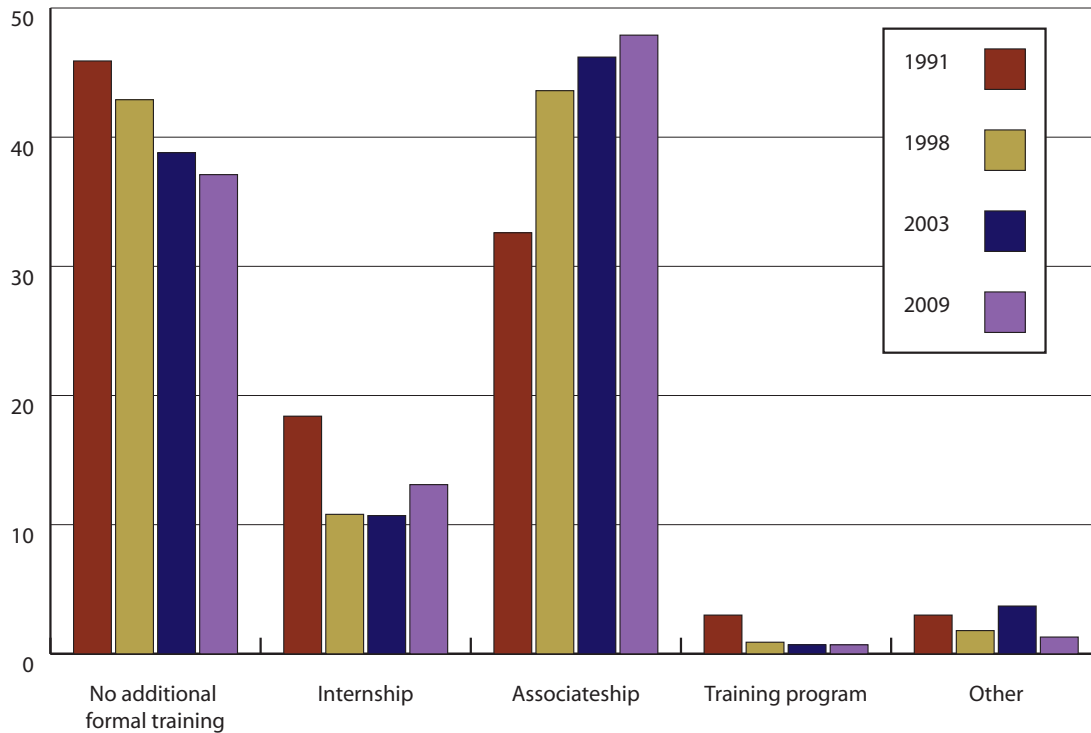


	<b>No additional formal training</b>	<b>Internship</b>	<b>Training program</b>	<b>Other</b>
2009	61.8%	33.7%	1.3%	3.2%
2003	63.3%	29.9%	0.8%	5.9%
1998	65.1%	28.7%	1.3%	4.9%

**Figure 7.15** Pre-licensure Clinical Training

**Post-licensure**

- In the 2009 survey, about one-third (37.1%) of respondents had not received additional post-licensure training.
- A larger portion (47.9%) of respondents to the 2009 survey had completed an associateship compared to 46.2% in 2003, 43.6% in 1998, and 32.6% in 1991.
- Of the remaining post-licensure responses, 13.1% had completed a field internship and 0.7% had fulfilled a state-mandated training program.



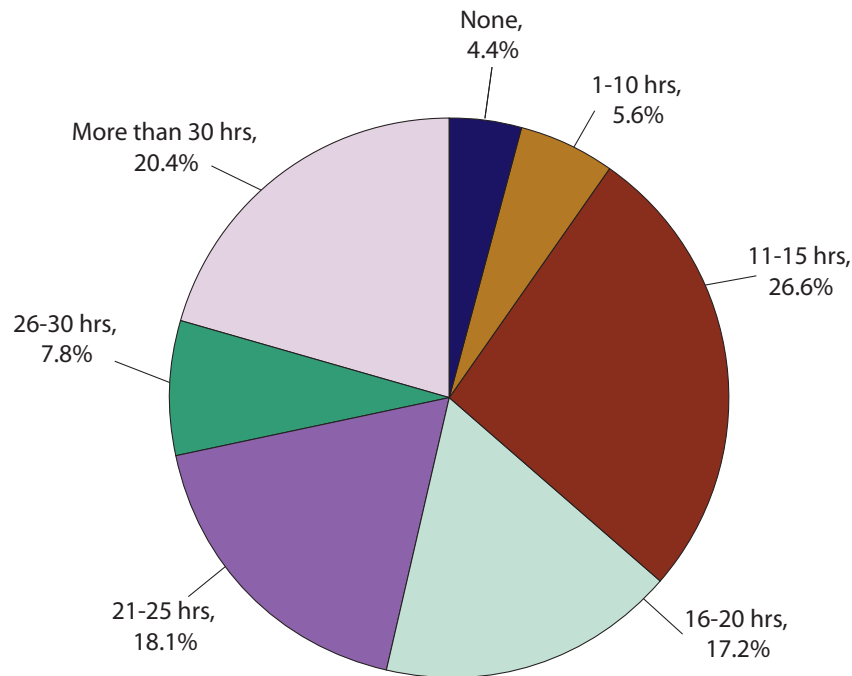
	<b>No additional formal training</b>	<b>Internship</b>	<b>Associateship</b>	<b>Training program</b>	<b>Other</b>
2009	37.1%	13.1%	47.9%	0.7%	1.3%
2003	38.8%	10.7%	46.2%	0.7%	3.7%
1998	42.9%	10.8%	43.6%	0.9%	1.8%
1991	45.9%	18.4%	32.6%	3.0%	3.0%

**Figure 7.16** Post-licensure Training

### Continuing Education Hours

Respondents to the 1998, 2003, and 2009 NBCE surveys were asked to indicate the number of continuing education hours they had completed during the previous year. The 2009 data revealed that chiropractors were increasingly likely to have taken some amount of continuing education in the past year (95.6% in 1998, 96.4% in 2003, and 97.2% in 2009) (Figures 7.17, 7.18, and 7.19).

- Most respondents (71.7%) had completed 16 or more hours.
- Almost half (46.0%) of respondents had completed between 16 and 25 hours.
- One-quarter (25.7%) had completed more than 25 hours.



**Figure 7.17** Hours of Continuing Education Last Year (1998)

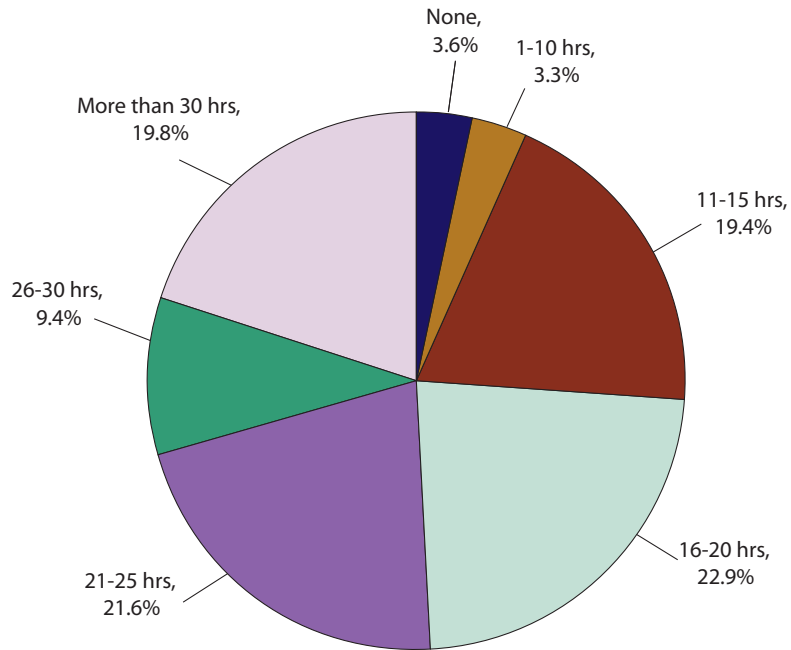


Figure 7.18 Hours of Continuing Education Last Year (2003)

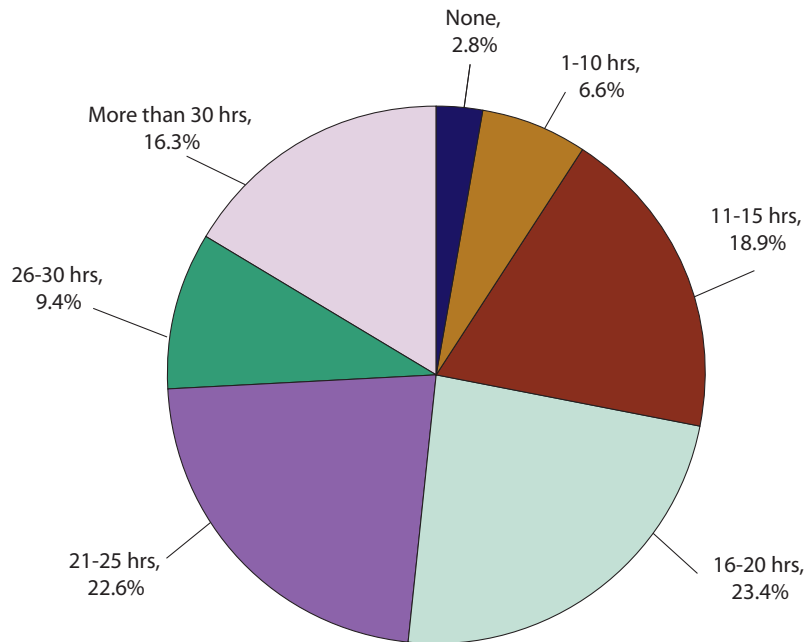
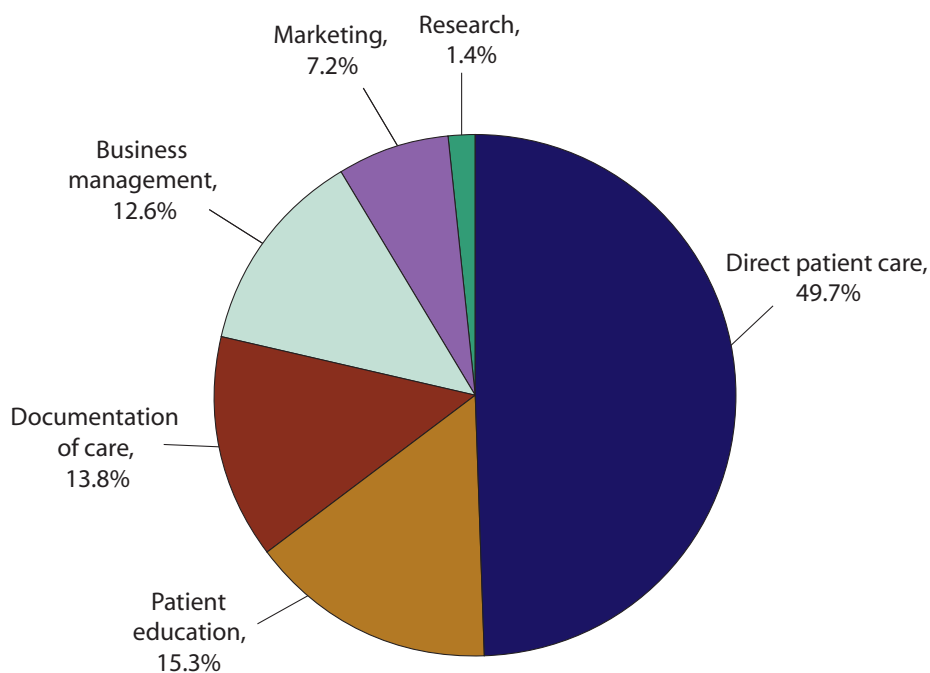


Figure 7.19 Hours of Continuing Education Last Year (2009)

## Components of Chiropractic Practice

The 2009 NBCE Survey of Chiropractic Practice also addressed the time committed to various functions associated with a chiropractic office. Time spent in direct patient care and education, documentation of care, and business management including marketing were rated in 2009. In 2003, patient care and patient education were listed separately. The 1998 survey also included a separate rating for marketing and one for research (Figures 7.20, 7.21, and 7.22).

According to respondents, a typical chiropractor now spends a quarter (25.2%) of occupational time documenting the care provided; this category has increased substantially since the question was asked in 1998 (13.8%) and 2003 (13.2%). Chiropractors now spend 57.4% of their practice time performing direct patient care and education and 17.4% with business management and marketing duties.



**Figure 7.20** Components of Chiropractic Practice (1998)

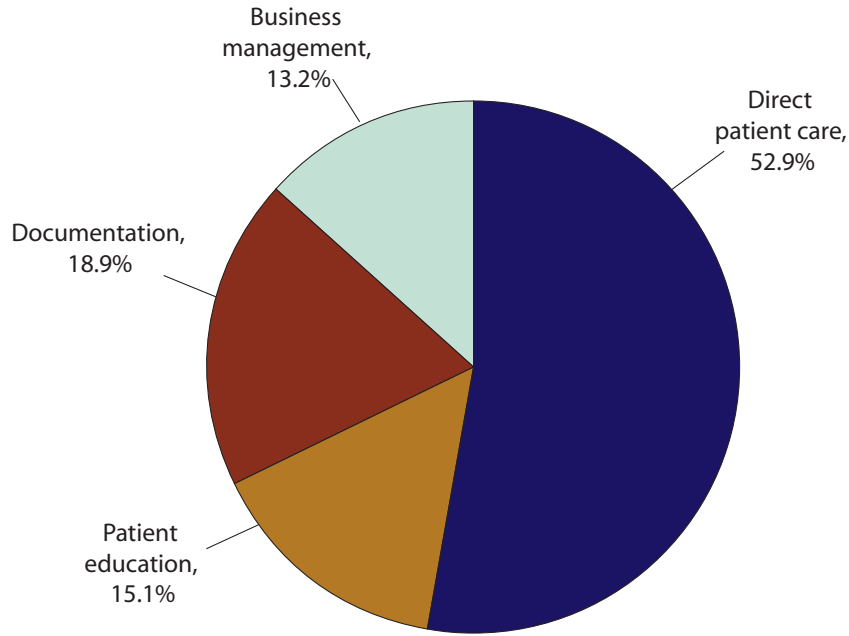


Figure 7.21 Components of Chiropractic Practice (2003)

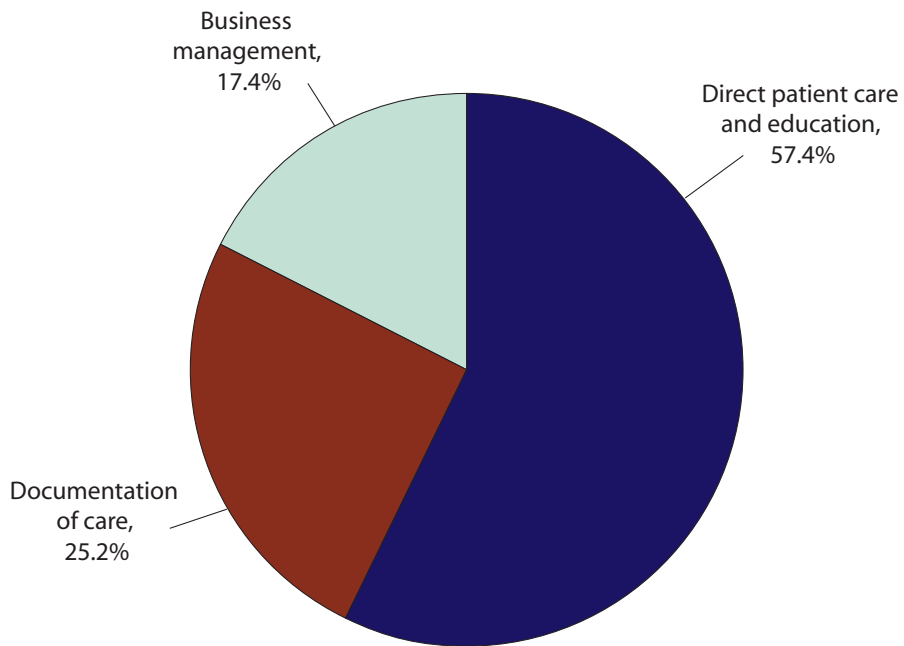


Figure 7.22 Components of Chiropractic Practice (2009)

## Survey Concerning Chiropractic Assistants

The 2009 Survey of Chiropractic Practice included several questions regarding the duties and certification or licensing of chiropractic assistants. Data from the *Survey Concerning Chiropractic Assistants* section are reported as unweighted data, due to the small numbers of respondents in some states.

By responding to one or more of the questions in this section, the majority (55.4%) of chiropractic practitioners indicated that they currently employ one or more chiropractic assistants to perform direct patient contact duties in their offices. This finding is consistent with the previous NBCE surveys, which contained a more limited question regarding the use of chiropractic assistants. When asked about their practice work environment, 41.1% of the respondents to the NBCE survey in 1998 and 41.5% in 2003 reported that they were delegating the application of adjunctive therapies to a chiropractic assistant.

Interestingly, while 44.1% of the respondents reported that their state requires some form of certification or licensure for non-chiropractors to perform patient contact duties in a chiropractic office, respondents also reported that certified or licensed chiropractic assistants are employed full-time in only 28.8% of their offices. This apparent disparity may be explained as follows: It is possible that many respondents who live in states requiring certification or licensure of chiropractic assistants do not employ these professionals to perform patient contact duties. One-quarter (25.5%) of chiropractors employ one or more licensed or certified massage therapists.

Practitioners who employ chiropractic assistants reported that they most commonly apply ice packs, electrical stimulation, hot packs, and ultrasound therapy to patients; they also frequently obtain patients' vital signs (Table 7.4).

Duty	Percent who Perform
Apply ice packs/cryotherapy	71.5%
Apply electrical stimulation/therapy	64.9%
Apply hot packs/moist heat	56.2%
Apply ultrasound therapy	50.8%
Obtain vital signs	45.2%
Perform massage treatments	37.6%
Teach and/or supervise exercises	36.8%
Apply mechanically assisted traction/decompression	35.5%
Take x-rays	22.8%
Apply vibratory therapy	20.0%

**Table 7.4** Duties of Chiropractic Assistants Who Provide Patient Care

Duty	Percent who Perform
Perform postural assessments	18.8%
Apply cold laser treatment	16.3%
Apply infrared, heat lamp, or heating pad	13.8%
Perform urine dipstick analysis	10.6%
Perform orthopedic/neurological examinations	10.4%
Perform thermography/EMG scans	10.0%
Apply direct current or iontophoresis	8.6%
Apply diathermy (shortwave or microwave)	8.4%
Apply whirlpool or hydrotherapy	6.4%
Apply paraffin baths	5.3%
Draw blood for testing	2.7%

**Table 7.4** Duties of Chiropractic Assistants Who Provide Patient Care, continued