



## Non-Surgical Spinal Decompression or Traction?

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In the past few years we've run a few articles about equipment that is used for diagnosis or treatment and has questionable clinical value (May 2004 – IDET, August 2004 - Spinal Digital Imaging, April 2005 - Surface EMG). In this case we are going to discuss a type of equipment that is actually OK and useful all by itself, but the issues show up in the exaggerated and unverified claims about its effectiveness, the frequency and duration of use, and the amount being charged for each treatment.

The pieces of equipment we are talking about here are referred to as Non-Surgical Spinal Decompression Systems. The one most commonly encountered is the DRX9000 (shown at right) which is manufactured by Axiom Worldwide.

One of the claims about the DRX9000 that can be found scattered all over the internet is:

*“amazing 86% success rate in treating lumbar disc related problems.”*

It is this type of claim that caught the attention of the Oregon Board of Chiropractic Examiners in their November 17, 2006 press release. This press release calls into question many of the claims made by the manufacturer and others about the DRX9000 and reminds chiropractors that Oregon law states that chiropractors may not *“use any advertising making untruthful, improper or deceptive statements.”*

The other issue that comes up is frequency of treatment. The “Medical Treatment Protocol” found in the DRX9000 Operator’s Manual recommends a typical treatment protocol of twenty treatments over a six-week course of therapy.

The Oregon Medical Advisory Committee was asked by the Workers Compensation Division to consider if treatment by the DRX9000 is experimental, unproven, ineffective or outmoded treatment and, if not, to provide guidance on whether and when treatment using this device would be appropriate. They concluded that it is an effective traction device and not experimental or unproven. They also recommended the following guidelines for use:



- Prescribe traction initially 2 to 4 times a week for no more than 2 to 4 weeks
- If traction is effective, improvement will be evident within two weeks
- The patient should be evaluated after 2 to 4 weeks
- Treatment beyond 2 to 4 weeks could be accomplished using a home traction device

Of course, the other issue is how much some chiropractors charge for each treatment. Since a DRX9000 costs somewhere in the range of \$65,000 (used) to \$125,000 (new), there is financial pressure to charge a lot. Charges in the \$100 to \$300 range per treatment are not uncommon. The American Chiropractic Association, in a recent Coding Clarification, states that CPT Code 97012 and HCPCS Code S9090 are appropriated codes for billing treatments that utilize the DRX9000 and other similar equipment. The Usual and Customary rate for Mechanical Traction (CPT™ Code 97012) in the Portland area is \$28.94.

I think this whole issue was best summed up by Dan Winslow, DC, who has used the DRX9000 a few times treating his patients: “It is a really nice traction device with lots of fancy buttons, but it is still a traction device.” ❖