

Emergence of Originality: A Brief History of Osteopathic Medicine

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The American Civil War- it conjures up so many images and emotions for us. Some are heroic, but most are grim. Our imaginations cringing at the sheer level of violence and suffering that was endured by those involved. As a physician during this war, there were countless courageous acts for those that needed so much help, but also anguish witnessing such an immense level of suffering. Dr. Andrew Taylor Still, the son of a Virginian minister and physician, was a hospital steward and surgeon living through the horrors of the Civil War, serving in the Kansas militia. His family had relocated to Kansas, with his parents, to aid in the slavery abolition movement and practice medicine. In addition to the unimaginable horrors of war, Dr. Still also endured personal tragedy. A spinal meningitis outbreak spread through Kansas and tragically killed three of his children. Coupled with the experiences of war, and unable to help his dying children, Dr. Still became increasingly frustrated with the inadequacies of the medical approach. At this time, most medications contained toxic substances such as alcohol, arsenic, opium, castor oil, and mercury, and employed procedures such as blood letting and purging.

Over the next decade, along with his medical practice, Dr. Still dug deeply into the fields of anatomy, physiology, spirituality as well as alternative approaches to healing- Native American, homeopathic, bonesetting, and others. He gradually came to the realization that the body had the capability to heal itself given the opportunity, and that optimizing the structure of the body would restore proper physiology, enabling the body to heal. Dr. Still pursued these theories as he developed a medical approach using manual manipulative treatment that a doctor could utilize to help a patient to heal. Not only would this result in health, but it was a way to avoid the harmful effects of medications and other questionable medical treatments. As he started integrating this approach into his practice, he was met with wonderful results and extremely satisfied patients. In 1874 he settled on a term for his new medical approach: Osteopathy. With its roots in "bone pathos" his intention with this term was to stress the importance of proper structure in maintaining health, focusing on the skeletal system as the framework of our structure. He found a fitting location to start a school to teach his ideas, and in 1892 Dr. Still opened the American School of Osteopathy in Kirksville, Missouri. The first class had 16 men and 5 women, and was extremely successful.

Over the years to follow, Osteopathic Medicine grew and blossomed. It gradually incorporated the medical developments as discoveries were introduced, such as utilizing x-ray studies and antibiotics. Osteopathic education always included all

the rigors of a traditional medical approach, in addition to teaching Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine (OMM). OMM was to be utilized whenever possible either to avoid medications and surgery, or when those treatments were either ineffective or not appropriate. Throughout the 20th Century, Osteopathy grew and became licensed in all 50 states with schools opening all over the country. Patients have always enjoyed the additional care and personal touch that Osteopaths employ, giving them alternative options for health and healing. Chiropractic care was developed shortly after Osteopathy. This, and other approaches to manual treatment and care of patients, have helped so many and offer wonderful healing as well. However, Osteopathic Medicine is unique in combining the traditional medical approach with a more holistic philosophy and integrating manual treatment. Over the past 30-40 years, some OMM techniques have been taught to non-physicians such as Physical Therapists and Massage Therapists utilizing techniques such as Strain/Counterstrain and Craniosacral therapy. These are quite varied in the depth of the ability of the practitioner and how they are utilized within their field of approach. However, this is taken out of the context of Osteopathy and while it may help their patients, is not to be confused with a more comprehensive Osteopathic Medical approach.

Today there are 26 Osteopathic Medical schools around the United States, as well as schools in Canada, Europe, Australia, Russia, and South America. Doctors of Osteopathy (DOs) practice in 65 countries. Approximately 11% of all doctors practicing in the US are Osteopaths. With the rigors of the modern medical community, technology, specialization, and less time for personal patient care, most DOs practice very similarly to MDs. While they would continue to apply the holistic Osteopathic philosophy, many do not utilize OMM. Some integrate occasional OMM when most appropriate, while a small percentage of DOs treat all of their patients with comprehensive OMM. If you are interested in pursuing this type of medical care, ask your local DO if they use OMM or refer to some of the resources listed below.

Turning tragedy into inspiration, Andrew Taylor Still immersed natural health and healing into a medical approach and helped so many physicians treat countless patients over the past 120 years, and will continue into the future.

“To find health should be the object of the doctor. Anyone can find disease.” - Andrew Taylor Still, M.D.

For more information on Osteopathy visit:

www.stoneridgehealingarts.com

And click on “Osteopathy”.

www.osteopathic.org

Search “find a D.O.” if you like. Call any near you to inquire about OMM, if interested, or select the specialty “Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment” if you would like to search for a specialist in this area.

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