

WHY OSTEOPATHY?

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WHAT IS OSTEOPATHY?

Osteopathy was pioneered in the late 1800's by an American frontier physician and surgeon named Andrew Taylor Still (1828-1917). Dr. Still's medical experiences in the Civil War combined with the tragic loss of three of his children to meningitis caused him to question the approach of traditional medicine and to seek an alternative and more compassionate system of healing. He articulated a number of fundamental principles which emerged from an intense study of human anatomy along with his belief in the unity of body, mind, and spirit and in the "power of Nature to cure". These principles collectively became what he called osteopathy. Dr. Still did not claim to have invented osteopathy but merely to have discovered it- a truth "as old as the cranium (*skull*) itself". He taught that osteopathy was a science dealing with the natural forces of the body and that the practitioner need understand that the tendency in the patient's body was always to get well. Dr. Still emphasized that a healthy body contains within it all the necessary mechanisms for defense and repair in the event of a traumatic, toxic, or infectious insult. He believed that such an insult to the structure of the body would impair its function and exert an abnormal influence on the patient as a whole. He further emphasized the importance of structural mobility and flexibility so that the forces within the patient would be free to manifest the inherent healing process. Doctors of osteopathy (D.O.s) use gentle hands-on manipulation as the means of skillfully restoring structural integrity once it has become deranged. The resultant expression of health is then available to promote the resolution of pain and illness and to prevent disease. These principles, espoused over 100 years ago yet still valid today, created the foundation of a science of medicine with a truly different perspective. As Dr. Still said, "To find health should be the object of the doctor. Anyone can find disease".

WHAT IS CRANIAL OSTEOPATHY?

The intense study of cranial osteopathy began in 1899 as a result of anatomical observations by William Garner Sutherland (1873-1954), an osteopathic physician and student of Dr. Still. Dr. Sutherland studied the bones and membranes of a human skull, individually and as a whole, and reasoned that it was designed for motion. He confirmed this theory when he discovered that the delicate bones of the head exhibited a subtle yet palpable rhythmic movement. Dr. Sutherland ultimately described four features or principles related to this movement which he termed the "primary respiratory mechanism" due to their importance and to their relationship to the physiologic centers in the brain. Years of clinical experience proved this motion to be vitally important in the expression of health and well-being and therefore became an integral component of the osteopathic philosophy and to an osteopathic treatment. Dr. Sutherland spent his entire

professional life, spanning over fifty years, fine-tuning and teaching his discovery. One of the most important applications of cranial osteopathy may well be the practitioner's ability to sense, interpret, and balance the patient's nervous system. An imbalance in this system, typically resulting from an overstimulation of the sympathetic nerves- those responsible for the so called "fight or flight" response- may be the biggest single factor in the cause and sustainability of chronic medical conditions. In addition, through its interactions with the endocrine and the immune systems, an imbalance in the nervous system can also negatively effect the body's ability to regulate and defend itself. Osteopaths who incorporate the philosophy and practice of osteopathy in the cranial field spend many years in medical school studying anatomy, participate in ongoing osteopathic cranial education courses, and frequently apprentice with elders of the profession learning this subtle and powerful art. In contrast, some "body workers", including massage therapists and physical therapists, and chiropractors have learned simplified forms of "craniosacral therapy", since fully sanctioned cranial study is not open to practitioners without a medical degree.

HOW DOES OSTEOPATHY WORK?

The breakdown in homeostasis, the body's natural ability to maintain itself, resulting in acute and chronic pain and illness dictates the necessity to restore the inherent capacity for self-healing. The osteopath accomplishes this by skilled hands-on treatment in which the goal is the restoration of proper structure and therefore proper function of the body's components. The hands are used diagnostically and therapeutically, not feeling for dis-alignment or dis-ease, but for a pre-established healing process set in motion by the Wisdom and Health in the patient. In this sense, the osteopath doesn't create the treatment process, he or she uncovers it. This is perhaps the essence of holistic medicine in that the osteopath is assisting in the patient's ability to access something greater than disease, the ultimate outcome of which is the restoration of balance and harmony throughout. The need for such a response by the patient may have arisen from a number of causal events the most obvious of which is likely to be from physical, mental, and/or emotional trauma. Though many such traumas occur as we live and age in the modern world, many others trace their origin back to childhood and to the birth process itself. 'As the twig is bent, so the tree inclines' is a saying that illustrates how early experiences can shape our later lives. Osteopaths appreciate that we are the accumulation of our experiences and can often read the body like a road map of past events. The symptoms that result from our accumulations and that commonly bring patients to osteopaths include but are not limited to headaches, anxiety, insomnia, fibromyalgia, muscle, joint, neck and back pains, breathing and digestive problems, inner-ear and sinus infections, and developmental delays. Aside from relief of specific symptoms, patients often experience an ongoing and improved sense of vitality and well-being as a result of treatment.

OSTEOPATHIC PRACTITIONERS

Dr. Still and Dr. Sutherland each heard a calling that prompted them to spend their lives learning about the workings of the human body and the restoration of health when it became compromised. With passion and dedication they examined and treated their patients and

ultimately came to the understanding that healing occurs through natural laws, laws not framed by human hands. They shared a deep reverence for the Architect of the human body. Dr. Still said that he loved all of his patients and that he saw God in their faces and forms. Before he died he pleaded with the osteopathic community to keep his teachings “pure”. As the twentieth century progressed, and newly discovered medications and technological advances promised miracle cures, this became difficult for many in the osteopathic profession as they joined the ranks of allopathic (M.D.) practitioners in practice and in spirit. There still exists today within the osteopathic community disagreement over the incorporation of allopathic medicine into the osteopathic framework. Only a small percentage of D.O.s still espouse the ‘classical’ approach and use hands-on techniques as the primary modality of treatment. Fortunately, there has always existed a core of ‘classical’ osteopaths who kept Drs. Still and Sutherlands’ teachings pure and they gladly taught those interested osteopaths who followed them. The following is a quote from a 1990 East-West magazine article entitled “The Osteopathy Alternative”;

“‘Osteopathy to me is a very sacred science,’ Still wrote.

‘It is sacred because it is a healing power through all nature.’

Classical osteopaths, following the original precepts set down

by Still, believe that we have the power within to heal ourselves.

That belief, passed down for more than a century through the

hands of osteopaths, gives us the option to step off the beaten

path of conventional medicine and onto a road where our own

innate wisdom is waiting for us.”