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## OSTEOPATHY: BODY'S MESSAGES AND INNATE ABILITY TO HEAL ITSELF

### Part 1: What is Osteopathy?

“The heart of osteopathy is the recognition of the body’s ability to cure itself, with some external help, of many pathologic conditions. This tenet echoes the belief enunciated by Hippocrates more than 2,000 years ago:” Our natures are the physicians of our diseases.” (Di Giovana et al., 2005)

Osteopathy is drug-free, non-invasive manual medicine that focuses on the body’s innate abilities to heal itself.

The main emphasis of osteopathy is the relationship between the organs and the musculoskeletal system.

The philosophy and purpose of osteopathic medicine is to treat the whole body rather than just a disease. Osteopaths strongly believe in the healing power of the body.

The father of osteopathy, Andrew Taylor Still, who in 1892 opened the American School of Osteopathy, “sought recognition as a completely original thinker” (Gevitz,1982). In his autobiography, Still maintained that “the percepts of his approach came to him in a single moment of inspiration, that no contemporary belief system or practice significantly influenced his theory that most diseases were directly or indirectly caused by vertebral displacements and that elimination of the latter through spinal manipulation would remove symptoms of pathology elsewhere in the body.” (Gevitz, 1982)

In his book: "Osteopathy, Research and Practice" (1910), Still wrote: "Osteopathy is to me a very sacred science. It is sacred because it is a healing power through all nature. It is a science that asks no favors or friendship of the old schools; they have long since acknowledged they have never discovered a single trustworthy remedy for any disease." (Still, 1910) He believed that "osteopathy is based on the Perfection of Nature's work and she succeeds in all because her plans are perfect." (Still, 1910) Still, through his work, was amazed "to see how faithfully Nature sticks to system." (Still, 1910)

Still discovered that we have health when all parts of our body are in line and if not, the effect is disease. He taught his student that "disease is the result of anatomical abnormalities followed by physiological discord. To cure disease the abnormal parts must be adjusted to the normal." (Still, 1910)

For Still a human body was "a machine run by the unseen force called life and that it may be run harmoniously it is necessary that there be liberty of blood, nerves, and arteries from their generating point to their destination" (N.Gevitz, 1982) as "every blood-vessel is accompanied and controlled by forces suited to the system of blood supply." (Still,1910) Still followed the analogy that an osteopath is an engineer and "should understand all the laws governing his engine and thereby master disease." (Autobiography of Still, 1910)

From years of experience and observation he became aware that "when an Osteopath explores the human body for the cause of disease he knows he is dealing with complicated perfection." (Still, 1910)

Still stated that an osteopath "must master anatomy and physiology and have a fairly good knowledge of chemistry"; he "should know the normal places of all bones, and their uses; how one is attached to another; where blood and nerve supply come from and how."(Still 1910) "If we do not, we must learn or we will blunder and fail because no variation will be allowed if we get health." (Still, 1910) By removing the friction or causes that have produced the disease, correcting blood flow and other fluids to the normal, bringing every bone from the Crown to the sole of foot to the normal position, osteopaths bring the human body to the condition necessary for good health. (Still, 1910)

The main philosophy of Dr. Still states that the body is a whole unit and “failure of one organ will produce disease of the whole body.” (Still, 1910)

While working on his method of healing, Still was confident that the task of the doctor was not to prescribe the drug to the patient, but to adjust their body to a healthy state. Moreover he believes in principles that govern the Universe and that osteopaths must obey all of their orders; otherwise the cure will be a failure. He stated many times that “the osteopath who succeeds best does so because he looks to Nature for knowledge and obeys her teaching, then he gets good result.” (Still, 1910)

His philosophy is that structure influences the function of the body, that it is a unit and has an innate ability for self-healing. This has become one of the fundamental concepts of osteopathy.

### **The body is a unit.**

One of the first principles of Osteopathy proclaims that “the body is a unit” and “does not function as a collection of separate parts but rather as integral whole.” (The osteopathic faculty committee at Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine, Kirksville, Missouri, 1953)

Nobody knows exactly how the body works and how its systems interact with one another. In reality “our body ages and become ill when the balance between its healthy cells and its ill cells is shifted in favor of the later. To stop aging means to change this unfavorable balance. Theoretically, if we create proper circumstances for that process, our cells are able to completely repair themselves within a seven-year period.”(Tombak, PhD, 2005) Therefore, by choosing osteopathy as a method of treating diseases and balancing our body, we can increase our longevity. It is one of the best methods of medicine as osteopaths work with all organs and systems of the human body.

Osteopathy is the identification and treatment of the true, underlying causes of disease. For example, if a patient is concerned about pain in the cervical vertebrae, but did not have any neck injuries before, the cause of the pain can be located in the lumbar vertebrae. Thereafter, particular attention should be paid to lumbar vertebrae

as the treatment of cervical vertebrae brings only temporary relief. In other words, it is useless to deal with the consequences without addressing the causes.

In another circumstance a patient with acute pain in the shoulder and shoulder joint can find relief after treatment in the temporal mandibular joint. This shows that osteopathy not only treats affected structures and functions but also treats the whole body system as well.

### **The body has its own memory.**

Our body speaks to us all the time. It speaks through its organs when it goes out of balance or warns us of possible sicknesses in the future through its messages. How we react in our lives is very important as all negative emotions first transit through the brain and then the information goes wherever it can. The body, then stores the memory of trauma: direct- physical, with immediate reaction, and indirect- emotional.

“An unconscious mind can record the accident in two-thousandths of a second. When such an event occurs, there are visible wounds that we can feel and treat, but there is also the fear, whose itinerary from the brain to the organ remains a secret to us. As a consequence of an accident, the body can produce a recurrent urinary tract or lung infection that can lead to a weakness to the organ involved, leaving it more susceptible in the future.” (Barral, 2005)

Manual osteopaths can identify any stress restriction or weakened physical elements within the body through manual contact. Excellently trained osteopaths are able to locate the area with the strongest emotional tension within a particular part of body.

Bruce Lipton, PhD, the American developmental biologist, called our body a community of 50 trillion living cells; “each cell is a living individual, a sentient being that has its own life and functions but interacts with other cells in the nature of the community” (Lipton, 2007). He states that every single function in our body is already present in every single cell, such as digestive, respiratory, excretory, musculoskeletal, endocrine, reproductive, nervous, and immune systems. (Lipton, 2007)

The largest organ in the body- our skin, contains a lot of information as it works as a defense mechanism from outer aggression. Trauma and psychological aggression create a “memory [which] imprints itself deep down inside the body. Its first target will be our “weak link”, our most sensitive spot or vulnerable organ. It can be the back, the liver, the intestine.” (Barral, 2007)

Manual osteopaths can release negative emotional energy which is being trapped in the tissues of the body with many osteopathic treatment methods such as soft tissue manipulation, myofascial (soft tissue) techniques, muscle energy techniques, counterstrain, facilitated positional release, and craniosacral therapy.

### **Brain and organs are connected.**

The brain is one of the most important organs in the body, and the most complex organ in the universe, as it controls the body and stores information within it. It receives impulses from nerves which are located throughout the body. The brain “is involved in everything you do. How you think, how you feel, how you act, and how well you get along with other people has to do with the moment-by-moment functioning of your brain” (D.Amen, 2005)

- “The brain is at least 1000 times faster than the fastest supercomputer in the world.
- The brain contains as many neurons as there are stars in the Milky Way – about 100 billion.
- Number of synapses in cerebral cortex = 60 trillion.
- A sand-grain-sized piece of brain contains 100,000 neurons and a billion synapses.
- The brain is always “on” – it never turns off or even rests throughout our entire life.
- The brain continually rewrites itself throughout life.” (Arntz et al., 2005)

Our brain and organs have a connection through the nervous system and hormones. When intense stressful situations occur, our “brain passes the excess stress

on to the organs, whose fibrous matter immediately records the emotion.” (Barral, 2007) The brain is the conductor of emotions. It memorizes everything. Our organs speak with our brain all the time. The brain records the emotions and sends them into the organs. In reverse, the organs’ cells record the emotions and send the messages back to the brain which ends in emotional imbalance. At the moment of the stress the brain may not differentiate what is physical and what is psychological, that gives us explanation that the organ can be the source of behavioral or emotional problem. Moreover, our sympathetic nervous system has a reaction faster than the brain and, consequently, “we have an instant reaction of an organ (stomach spasm, gallbladder contraction, etc.).” (Barral, 2007)

For example, if a person has problems at work with a lot of frustration and negative emotions the body can create the stomach irritation and the “brain will receive a combination of psychological and physical information.” (Barral, 2007) It will be difficult to separate the emotional and physical roots of the symptoms, and “[a] vicious cycle will be created.”(Barral, 2007) In this situation using Visceral Manipulation osteopaths can release the tension around the stomach, significantly decrease the amount of negative information that comes to the brain and thus break the vicious cycle.

According to D. Hamilton, PhD, “childhood trauma is linked with a high number of stress-related illnesses in adulthood. It can cause a flood of stress hormones that kill cells in an area of the brain that stores memories (the hippocampus), actually dissolving them”. (Hamilton, 2010)

Besides that, “the effect of words upon children up to age of six is hypnotic and very difficult to overcome as they grow older and begin to feel a destructive toll upon their bodies and health. Often, the search for better feelings leads to violent behavior and a variety of addictions as the result of their damaged nervous system” (Segal, 2010) Thus it is extremely important how we communicate with our children and how we protect them from psychological trauma, especially between ages three and ten as these are “a time of rapid social, intellectual, emotional, and physical development. Brain activity in this age group is more than twice that of adult, and although new

synapses continue to be formed throughout life, never again will the brain be able to master new skills or adapt to setback so easily.” (G.Amen, 2005)

The question of why it is highly important to treat children may arise. An osteopath provides a simple: “when we look at a child, we never know who or what that child can be, and when we look at an adult, we never know who or what that individual could have been.” (Agustoni, 2013) Using Craniosacral Therapy for children, an osteopath can prevent or resolve many conditions “that would otherwise detract from who that individual will become” (Agustoni, 2013). From the foregoing it follows that “early intervention with pediatric Craniosacral Therapy can positively affect developmental, structural, sensory, learning, behavioral, and personality disorders.” (Agustoni, 2013)

Our body is a feedback system. Every trauma is recorded by our brain and stored in our body, in our psychological and physical unconscious mind. It affects our organs directly, as our organs are in motion all the time within the body (for example, the lungs, liver, spleen, pancreas, and intestines are moving with the diaphragm; the pelvic moves with diaphragm too but mostly depends on leg activity) then, when we have injury, stress, infection, or even pregnancy with delivery, etc. our organs lose their mobility. (Barral, 2007) Mobility of the organs and our negative emotions directly create visceral reactions within our body and then affects our health.

In these circumstances an osteopath can improve an organ’s mobility through visceral manipulation by gentle and precise pressure and movement. An osteopath analyzes the body in whole and finds the organ that does not move correctly and determines why. By improving organ mobility, osteopaths improve their functioning as they can break the negative emotional pattern that influences that organ’s healthy activities due to stress, trauma, illness, or emotional imbalance.

### **Messages from the body**

Trauma and psychological aggression create a “memory [which] imprints itself deep down inside the body. Its first target will be our “weak link”, our most sensitive spot or vulnerable organ. It can be the back, the liver, the intestine.” (Barral, 2007)

Our organs become vulnerable because of the traumatic, emotional and physiological experiences, including childhood disease, birth trauma or even physical distress due to fetal position 'in utero'. As we worry more in our lives, we are prone to more imbalances in our bodies, which become known to us through anxiety, pain and diseases. Each problem in our life, whether it is a trauma or negative emotion, has possible contributing factors that cause the disease or imbalance. Our body is constantly sending us messages. We only need to pay close attention to our emotional and physical conditions in order to prevent future diseases. Each part of our body has a special message for us but sometimes we do not want to hear or see what is really going on in our life.

Osteopaths can clearly identify the relationship between emotions and internal diseases. As well, there are specific techniques for every organ. For example, the gall bladder will be suffering if the person disagrees with something in their life and is constantly irritated by one thing or another. Then the gallbladder can be prone to producing gallstones. A manual osteopath can help to empty gallbladder from the stones by using specific visceral manipulations.

If there are problems with the liver, which is the main organ representing our inner being, we feel tense and aggressive and suffer from depression. "The liver and the brain like to exchange their energies. When one of them is lacking energy, it takes it from the other." (Barral, 2007) A bad liver means feeling blue. A person with liver like this will feel constant inner struggle and conflict with the behavior like a victim. A manual osteopath can work on this problem. Visceral manipulations are very helpful for the liver and the benefit can be felt immediately.

Furthermore, the stomach represents social life and self-realization, the spleen – anxiety and feeling of danger, the intestines - stress. It is very important that an osteopath restores the function of the intestines as it allows us to get rid of accumulated negativity from the body.

All of these organs can be treated by manual osteopathy by using gentle and precise pressure and movements. The role of the osteopath is tremendously important; however, when we are aware of our life problems and are willing to change, the body is able to heal itself promptly.

## Spine

One of the main factors that can damage our health is a neglected spine. Some people have a hunched back, some have their abdomen pushed forward. More often people have these symptoms because they have weak muscles.

Manual osteopaths can improve muscle strength with muscle energy techniques and stretching exercises.

Our spine supports the whole body. If our spine is ill then the whole body becomes ill too. Most of the people don't know how to move properly. As a result, the vertebrae can be dislocated and can create pressure on nerves and blood vessels that are connected with the muscles and organs. "If a nerve remains under pressure for a long time, the organ depending on that nerve develops pathologies that are hard to cure" (M.Tombak, 2005)

According to M. Tombak, there is a list of disorders that could be caused by neglecting our spine:

- **Cervical:** allergies, loss of hearing, sight problems, eczema, throat problems, and thyroid gland disorders.
- **Thoracic:** Asthma, pain in the lower arms, back pains, gall bladder disorders, liver problems, stomach and duodenum ulcers, kidney diseases, skin disorders (acne, rashes, eczema, boils)
- **Lumbar:** hemorrhoids, bladder disorders, irregular menstrual cycle, menstrual pains, impotence, knee pain, lumbago, lumbar pain, poor blood circulation in the legs, ankle swelling, cold feet, weak legs, muscular spasm in the legs

Moreover, if problems are present in these areas of the body, close attention should be paid to emotions and what they are trying to tell you about your life. There are some of the messages:

- **Spine:** Feeling weak, confused, fearful, insecure, unsupported, and alone. Feeling that the world is not unsafe place to live in. (Segal, 2010)

**Cervical spine: C 1**-fear, confusion, fight or flight, wanting to run away from problems and responsibilities. Feeling not good enough; too focused on people's opinions; taking on other people's problems; difficulty saying no. On physical level: headaches, insomnia, dizziness, exhaustion, anxiety, nervous breakdown, etc. (Segal, 2010)

**C 2**- Feeling rejected, angry, resentful, and inflexible; thinking that you know better than others. On the physical level: allergies, earaches, problems with eyes, sinuses, etc. (Segal, 2010)

**C 3** – Judging yourself and others; low self-esteem; feeling limited, impatient, irritated. On the physical level: ear, teeth, jaw, headache, acne, eczema, etc. (Segal, 2010)

**C 4** – Thinking that life is not fair, old grudges, sadness, suppressing your feeling of anger. On the physical level: heavy fever, adenoids, sinusitis, etc. (Segal, 2010)

**C 5** – Fear of being wrong, difficult self-expression due to concern what others may think. On the physical level: sore throat, hoarseness, etc. (Segal, 2010)

**C 6** – A lot of worries, anxiety and stress, fixing others' problems instead of yours. On the physical level: stiff neck, shoulder pain, etc. (Segal, 2010)

**C 7** – uninspired, drained, lack and fear of the future. On the physical level: thyroid issues, shoulder pain, frozen shoulder, elbow issues.

Moreover, if your emotions from the past are suppressed, it affects your back. Pain in the upper back means carrying the world on your shoulders, middle back signifies that a person is stuck in the past and lower back represents financial insecurities. (Segal, 2010)

Manual osteopaths will use soft tissue manipulation in order to evaluate the conditions of tissues of the body. This technique helps the body's fluid flow smoothly. Then an osteopath will use the osteopathic articular technique in order to reduce

muscle spasms, pain and discomfort, and ease irritations around a joint. This technique will make the joints more mobile. An osteopath also can use craniosacral therapy, counterstrain, muscle energy and myofascial release. With a proper assessment an osteopath will determine the best course of treatment. With manual osteopathy the patient's pain will often disappear. The level of energy will increase with bringing body to the balance and natural state of self-healing.

In summary, the human body functions as an integral whole. Through contact and communication with the nervous system, muscles and surrounding fascia respond to physical injuries, emotional trauma, and habitual patterns of thoughts and actions. As previously mentioned, our emotional state can have an effect on our physical body and vice versa, and our body is constantly sending us messages about the imbalances within. Osteopathy is a non-invasive, drug-free manual medicine that helps the body unfold its innate ability to heal itself and allows the body to go back to its healthy state. By paying close attention to the messages from our body and by applying osteopathic treatments we are able to prolong our lives.

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