

**The aging population and the case for integrating Manual
Osteopathy in the normal healthcare framework**

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Hypothesis:

My hypothesis is that integration of Manual Osteopathy in the normal healthcare framework could be the key ingredient in dealing with the large influx of baby-boomers overwhelming the healthcare system.

Outline of the problem at hand:

There is a healthcare crisis about to happen. In the entire western world in the near future the healthcare systems will be overwhelmed with a large influx of people of the baby-boomer generation with various age related medical conditions. At the same time the workforce will shrink due to the lower birth-rate of successor-generations.

The healthcare system as we know it today will crumble because of diminishing resources combined with a higher need for resources at the same time. The workforce will be smaller (less people of the working generation and more pensioners). The workforce will be less productive (due to higher average age of workforce). There will be less tax revenue to pay for healthcare cost (due to smaller workforce generating income from work). And there will be increased resources needed (because of an increased number of older people with healthcare problems and people living longer while suffering from various illnesses).

What is Manual Osteopathy?

Osteopathy is a form of drug-free non-invasive manual medicine that focuses on total body health by treating and strengthening the musculoskeletal framework, which includes the joints, muscles and spine. Its aim is to positively affect the body's nervous, circulatory and lymphatic systems.

This therapy is a unique holistic (whole body) approach to health care. Manual Osteopaths do not simply concentrate on treating the problem area, but use manual techniques to balance all the systems of the body, to provide overall good health and wellbeing.

Dr. Andrew Taylor Still established the practice of Osteopathy in the late 1800s in the United States of America, with the aim of using manual 'hands on' techniques to improve circulation and correct altered biomechanics, without the use of drugs ¹.

Because Manual Osteopathy focusses on treatment of various illnesses without drugs through a combination of gentle mobilizations, physical therapy and proper nutrition it is ultimately suitable as a tool to deal with the various inflammatory diseases affecting middle aged and elderly people.

Manual Osteopathy is very suitable as an addition to the normal healthcare framework of family doctor, chiropractor / physiotherapist and hospital because of its focus on drug-free treatment of illnesses which includes a strong focus on prevention. Because of the low price-point of the treatments and the strong focus on prevention Manual Osteopathy is ultimately suitable to deal with the looming healthcare crisis.

What does Manual Osteopathy treat?

Osteopaths treat more than you think. Many patients present with complaints of aches in the head, back, neck, and heel/ foot pain; sciatica; shin splints; tennis elbow and repetitive strain injury. Other patients suffer from asthma; arthritis; digestive problems; carpal tunnel syndrome; whiplash and postural problems.

Osteopaths also deal regularly with patients who have been injured in the workplace, at home or while playing sport ¹.

Why Manual Osteopathy is especially suited for treatment of various illnesses of elderly people?

The general health of a person is always heavily influenced by proper nutrition, sufficient exercise and sufficient rest. If one of these factors is lacking we often see a snowball effect in the decline of general health. Because there is a lack of proper nutrition and sufficient rest there is an increase in general inflammation in the body. This leads to a lack of energy, which in turn leads to lack of exercise. Eventually as a person grows older, the cumulative effect of these combined factors causes a person to get sick. Often we are talking about age related inflammatory diseases (like the various forms of arthritis). Age related inflammatory diseases lead to decreased mobility. Lack of mobility combined with increased inflammation leads to decreased activity level, which can lead in rapid degradation of a person's health. With any inflammatory disease of the musculoskeletal system manual osteopathy with its gentle mobilization technique is ultimately suitable to relieve pain and increase of range of motion. Being pain free enables a person to stay active and healthy. In the treatment of inflammatory diseases like arthritis, proper nutrition plays an enormous role. Nutritional knowledge also is a vital part of the knowledgebase of a Manual Osteopath. Proper nutritional advice for an anti-inflammatory diet plays a vital role in the treatment of age related inflammatory diseases like the various forms of arthritis.

Treatment of age and lifestyle related diseases (a practical scenario):

The following scenario will highlight some of the challenges of the traditional healthcare system and ways in which a Manual Osteopath can help. The following is a typical example of a middle-aged to elderly person. This is an example of a certain disease-pattern. The variety of health problems that can be treated by a manual osteopath goes far beyond this described disease pattern. A person's health always is a reflection of the performance of the entire body and mind. With a person's general health there often is a snowball effect where one health problem causes

another health problem and the combined symptoms prevent successful treatment. For example a person with knee pain visits his family doctor and after a 10 minute visit is prescribed painkillers and anti-inflammatory drugs to treat the arthritis in his knee. However the painkillers give him an upset stomach. Also a large part of his knee pain was his diet which leads to inflammation in various parts of the body (this diet is high in trans-fat, gluten and sugar). Because of his desk job he has little movement and he does not do any sports (also because of the knee pain). He is overweight, depressed and his knee hurts. And after starting the prescribed medication he can add an upset stomach to the list of health problems. It is clearly visible that we are dealing with a complex situation where some of the symptoms prevent the patient from taking the necessary steps to solve the various health problems. The health problems include arthritis, depression, obesity and lack of energy due to bad diet.

The same person visits a Manual Osteopath. The Manual Osteopath spends an hour assessing not only the knee of the patient but also pays a lot of attention to the general posture, eating habits, body type, activity level, work posture, previous injuries, diet and exercise. The first consult ends with five minutes of gentle massage of the effected leg and gentle traction of the affected knee. The patient leaves the office with a list of recourses including: strict diet recommendations and a schedule with exercises to increase muscle tone. The manual osteopath sees the person for an hour each week for the first 2 months. Each visit Time is the diet and exercise regime is fine-tuned. Each visit the Manual Osteopath also performs gentle mobilization techniques to the affected knee and gentle massage to the affected leg. After one month the diet high in Omega3 fatty acids and fresh vegetables and without any gluten, dairy and processed food starts paying off. The diet in combination with the gentle stretches and Osteopathic mobilizations enables the patient to go for short walks without too much pain in his knee. The patient starts walking every day (slowly increasing the distance). After one year the pain in the knee is gone. Also the obesity problem of the patient is gone because of the better diet and increased exercise. The patient realizes that he is the key person in this success story. He also knows that he could not have achieved this triumph without the knowledge and effort of the Manual Osteopath. The patient knows how much the arthritis in his knees is affected by absolutely staying away from processed food, dairy and gluten. The Manual Osteopath was able to treat the patient successfully because of his holistic approach. The treatment involved diet, osteopathic mobilizations, motivational coaching and a personal training strategy. But above all the successful treatment involved lots of time.

This example is a very typical problem of a person with arthritis and excess bodyweight. It could easily have been an example of a different disease pattern. However, because of the aging population in the western world various forms of arthritis will affect a large proportion of the population. Manual Osteopathy lends itself very well to treat these various forms of arthritis. The gentle Osteopathic mobilizations give instant pain relief. The nutritional knowledge of the Manual Osteopath can build a diet that fights the inflammation that is the basis of inflammatory diseases like the various forms of arthritis.

The targeted physical exercises that the Manual Osteopath prescribes to the patient help fix muscle imbalances and thereby adjust movement patterns and relieve pain. It is the combination of this holistic approach with plenty of time invested that makes Manual Osteopathy a very successful treatment method for the various illnesses affecting the large baby-boomer generation.

Providing a proactive solution to the imminent healthcare crisis using Manual Osteopathy:

To prevent the current healthcare system from shutting down due to long waiting times and rising cost it will have to be restructured. The current healthcare system is mainly focused on treatment instead of prevention of diseases. Part of the restructuring will come in the form of time saving innovations, but because decreased financial resources and the large increased demand innovation alone will not be enough to keep the healthcare machine working.

To prevent shutdown of the healthcare system it will have to be reformed. This reform will have the two essential components of decentralization and prevention.

Manual Osteopathy is the ideal tool to accomplish this shift to prevention and gentle treatment using nutrition and gentle mobilizations (instead of medication of pain).

Manual osteopathy treatment is also less costly than traditional (chiropractor and physiotherapy) treatment while being just as effective. This enables the creation of a decentralized healthcare system at lower cost (compared to the traditional web of doctor's office, chiropractor, physiotherapist and hospitals).

In the example in the previous paragraph the lack of success in the treatment by the family doctor was not due to lack of knowledge but due to lack of invested time and lack of a holistic approach. The family doctor might refer a patient to a physiotherapist, chiropractor or a dietician. However due to the gaps in the reimbursement schedules of the healthcare insurance companies for physiotherapy and chiropractor treatments there is a high chance that there will be gaps in the treatment.

Manual Osteopathy can provide treatments which are similar to the treatments a physiotherapist or chiropractor at a lower hourly rate. The lower hourly rate in combination with a holistic approach enables a manual osteopath to fill the gaps in the treatment covered by healthcare plans.

The shift in focus from treatment to prevention:

Current pre-retirement generations have numerous healthcare concerns that could lead to illness or even disability when they are older. A major component in the reform of the current healthcare system must be a strong shift from medication of diseases to prevention. If we look at the major illnesses affecting people, many of these diseases can either be prevented or managed without medication utilizing a strong shift towards a healthier diet and more movement.

If we look at major diseases causing disability or a decrease in productivity, many can be prevented by better lifestyle choices at younger age. Heart disease, cancer and a wide range of inflammatory diseases (like various forms of arthritis) can be prevented by a healthier diet and sufficient movement at a younger age.

The science of healthy nutrition that does not lead to heart disease, cancer and inflammatory diseases (like arthritis) is a major component of Manual Osteopathy.

Nutrition plays a major role in the treatment as well as prevention of inflammatory diseases of the body's connective tissue.

Decentralization of the healthcare system:

Manual Osteopathy is a very suitable tool to de-centralize the healthcare system. With the increased influx of patients and the decreased resources the healthcare system will be facing in the next decades, decentralization will be essential. Currently the healthcare web is mainly made up by medical doctor offices and hospitals managing the medical aspect of healthcare and Physiotherapist and Chiropractor offices dealing with rehabilitation of injured patients and pain management through manual therapy.

Manual Osteopathy is as effective in pain management and rehabilitation as physiotherapy and chiropractic are.

Manual Osteopathy is paid at a lower hourly rate compared to Physiotherapy and Chiropractic treatment. This enables Manual Osteopathy to fill the gap in treatment plans for chronic patients.

Manual Osteopaths are very flexible and can work in a large variety of settings (medical offices, chiropractor and physiotherapist offices, sports clinics, elderly homes and even treatments at home). This flexibility at a lower price point makes the manual osteopath the ultimate tool to realize the needed decentralization of the healthcare system.

Summarizing how Manual Osteopathy can prevent a looming healthcare crisis:

In the previous paragraphs we have come to the conclusion that there is crisis about to happen in the healthcare system due to a large influx of people of the baby-boomer generation combined with decreased resources at the same time.

Because of its holistic approach Manual Osteopathy is ultimately suitable for treatment of the various inflammatory diseases (like various forms of arthritis) that the baby-boomer generation will suffer from.

The strong focus on gentle mobilizations, proper nutrition and physical exercise make Manual Osteopathy a strong tool enabling a shift towards prevention instead of treatment needed to deal with the looming healthcare crisis.

Because of its relative lower price-point Manual Osteopathy is ultimately suitable to fill the gaps in the treatment plans of the traditional healthcare providers (like chiropractors and physiotherapists).

Because of the flexibility of Manual Osteopathy it is ultimately suitable to decentralize the healthcare system (working in a variety of settings outside the traditional network of doctor's office, hospital and chiropractor's office).

This combination of prevention, decentralization, holistic approach and a lower price point make Manual Osteopathy the ultimate tool in reforming the healthcare system.

References:

1. Christian Nordqvist (2015): <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/70381.php>