

OSTEOPATHIC MASSAGE: COMBINING MASSAGE THERAPY AND OSTEOPATHY IN A TREATMENT

By Angele Boyle

Since the beginning of March 2011, I have had the opportunity while attending the National Academy of Osteopathy, of learning osteopathic techniques and treatments, and to apply these principles and techniques in my own existing massage practice. I have noticed that my patients have benefited greatly by combining the principles of both manual therapies which has improved the results of their treatments during this time. This report outlines the differences and similarities of the two manual therapies and how together, they complement one another, allowing for better results during and post treatment.

What is Massage Therapy?

"The practice of massage therapy is the assessment of the soft tissue and joints of the body and the treatment and prevention of physical dysfunction and pain of the soft tissues and joints by manipulation to develop, maintain, rehabilitate or augment physical function, or relieve pain." (*Massage Therapy Act, 1991*)

The origin of massage is unknown as several cultures had techniques that eventually evolved into the massages we receive today. Literature from all over the world has been found to mention techniques of massage such as kneading, pressing, rubbing, tapping as a form of healing. The origin of the word "massage" is derived from either the Arabic word "mass," meaning to touch, or the Greek word "massein," to knead.

The oldest medical book in existence mentions the treatment of paralysis and reduced circulation using massage. That was written in China in approximately 1000 BC and is called "The Yellow Emperor's Classics of Internal Medicine." And Hippocrates, circa 460-375 BC, discussed "gently rubbing" a dislocated shoulder following reduction to aid healing. (<http://www.massagetherapy101.com/mailbag23.aspx>)

What is Osteopathy?

"Osteopathy (founded in 1874 by Dr. Andrew Taylor Still in the USA) is an established internationally recognized manual medicine system of diagnosis and treatment, which

lays its main emphasis on the structural and functional integrity of the musculoskeletal system”.

“Osteopaths use a variety of hands-on physical treatments. These include soft tissue techniques, joint mobilization & manipulation, muscle energy treatment and functional (strain and counter strain) techniques. These techniques are normally employed together with exercise, dietary, and occupational advice in an attempt to help patients recover from pain, disease and injury”. (National Academy of Osteopathy, website)

The origin of osteopathy dates back to the nineteenth century, but it has philosophical connections right back to the Hippocratic school of medical thought in the fourth century.

An American Doctor, Andrew Taylor Still, founded it in 1874. Dr. Still's instinct was to look for treatments that would stimulate the body's own healing mechanisms, rather than trying to destroy or suppress a particular disease process. Dr. Still decided that the body was capable of being its own drug manufacturer and distributor. We now know how true this is: that the immune system (within the lymphatic system, tissues and organs) does just this. It organizes, manufactures, and distributes specific responses to specific infections or diseased areas of the body. Another example is the production of endorphins by the body to fight pain.

So what differences exist between the two therapies?

Although both manual therapies ultimately have the same goal of restoring and improving physical function and relieving pain; the approach, techniques and time spent working on a patient can vary greatly between both therapies. An osteopathic treatment can almost always be done with a client fully clothed while a massage therapy treatment is typically received by a patient, laying on a table, undressed but covered fully with a sheet and blanket. A massage treatment will generally cover a broader area on the body such as back, shoulders, leg, and a lotion or oil will almost always be applied for many of the soft tissue, massage techniques. An osteopathic treatment generally does not require lotion/oil unless massaging or warming up a specific area of the body, and the patient can be treated over clothing. Although a massage session can last up to 1.5 hours, most osteopathic treatments are less than an hour long unless cranial osteopathy techniques are applied.

Some Differences:

Osteopathy

Treatment with clothing on

Shorter treatment time

More focused treatment area

Patients seek treatment mainly
pain reduction/elimination

Massage Therapy

Treatment without clothing but covered
under sheets

Longer treatment time

Broader treatment area of body

Some patients seek treatment for
relaxation purposes only

So what similarities exist between the two therapies?

The most important tool for both a massage therapist and manual osteopath, is the hand. A well trained manual therapist can detect small differences in texture, temperature, motion and circulation within the tissues and joints of the body through the use of highly sensitive palpation skills. This skill allows the therapist to narrow in on the area needed to be treated and/or find secondary areas of dysfunction that even the patient is unaware of.

There are a variety of similar techniques used by both types of therapists. Soft tissue/massage techniques (such as effleurage, petrissage, frictions, trigger point release), joint mobilizations, muscle energy, PNF, myofascial release, craniosacral therapy (invented by an osteopath named John E. Upledger, D.O.), and breathing exercises are some of the many techniques used by both types of therapists to treat injury and pain.

How do I see combining Osteopathy and Massage Therapy as a treatment?

What is evident is that both types of therapy use similar techniques to treat a patient. Ultimately, the therapist is trying to alleviate/eliminate pain and restore the client's body's ability to heal. What is crucial in all healing processes, is the flow of body fluids such as blood, lymph (greatly affecting the immune system), as well as the flow of nerve impulses to and from the brain to each and every part of the body right down to the cellular level. When any or all of these flows are interrupted at a site, the body

cannot function at its best. By combining varying Osteopathic and Massage techniques, flow can be improved or fully restored aiding in the healing process.

Typically, as a massage therapist, a patient's treatment last approximately 1 hour in duration. Depending on the patient's complaint, I would spend (prior to learning manual osteopathy) a greater amount of time on the affected area doing different massage/soft tissue techniques. I may have used some joint mobilization techniques but mainly applied soft tissue/massage as well as some stretches at the end of the treatment. Depending if the patient had a stressful day or was experiencing a higher degree of pain than normal, I may have also encouraged some deep breathing to encourage relaxation.

Listed below are 2 different patient cases that I have been treating over the last 4 months incorporating both manual osteopathy and massage therapy techniques in a one hour session, both with great success.

Patient #1: Patient 1 has been coming to me for upper shoulder, posterior neck pain, with limited rotation of cervical spine to the right. This person has been experiencing these complaints for approximately 2 months. Despite some improvement with a weekly treatment, the patient's range of motion and cessation of pain improved only by about 50%. In March, I started incorporating in addition to the massage techniques, various cervical joint mobilizations such as supine traction, lateral flexion/rotation of C/S, and supine figure 8. Along with C/S muscle energy techniques such as cervical forward flexion and cervical rotation, I was able to get an increased cervical spine range of motion from my client by an additional 50% after just one treatment! In addition, my client's perception of pain decreased substantially. By the 3rd treatment incorporating both osteopathic and massage techniques, the patient's ROM was restored fully and her pain was eliminated. We have resumed to bi-monthly treatments as a preventative measure, but to date, the original complaints have not returned. Other signs that have improved, are a noticeable decrease in the hypertonicity of the cervical muscles as well a "boggy" feeling in the right upper trapezius area.

Patient #2: Patient 2 has been coming for treatment bi-monthly for the last year. He is a figure skating coach who wears skates 8-10 hrs/day, being in a cold environment year-round. His main complaint is low back pain (lumbar region) with no radicular pain, and right shoulder pain along the medial border of the scapula and up into the posterior neck region. Also patient is suffering from headaches on a weekly basis. Forward flexion of the lumbar spine is normal with some pain (pain scale 3), and lateral flexion of L/S is limited with pain on right side. Prior to March, simply using massage therapy

techniques such as effleurage, trigger point therapy, and stretching, I was able to alleviate 80% of the patient's complaint with ongoing bi-weekly treatments. Since incorporating some joint mobilization techniques such as lateral recumbent joint mobilization of lumbar spine and PA joint mobilization with pelvis pull, the patient's lumbar range of motion has been restored without pain. Certain muscle energy techniques such as seated lateral flexion and rotation of lumbar spine have also improved pain perception and range of motion and decreased muscle hypertonicity. Similar techniques were used on the shoulder/neck region with favourable results. All headaches have subsided. The patient is now coming for monthly treatments for prevention only.

From my patients, the general feedback is that the osteopathic techniques are perceived as gentler than some of the deep tissue work of massage therapy while getting better or same results. By combining both the Osteopathy and Massage therapy into a treatment session, not only is the client receiving a very well rounded therapy session but also benefitting from the feeling of relaxation which a massage therapy treatment is very well known for.

From my point of view, incorporating osteopathic techniques into a patient's treatment plan has helped with the fatigue I sometimes experience during or after a day of treatment. Many of the osteopathic techniques are gentler than the massage techniques and therefore physically stress my body less than when I simply used massage techniques alone. Osteopathy has increased my knowledge base, increasing the size of my "toolbox", thus opening up more options for treatment, and success of the said treatment. Adding a hydraulic table to my office has also helped me as I can now do more techniques and adjust table height to accommodate different body types (large or small), in different positions depending on the technique used.

Conclusion

The more you understand the structure and function of the body, the more ways you will develop to treat the client's musculoskeletal pain and impairments. As a therapist, combining osteopathic and massage techniques, I can create new treatments, new combinations of techniques, and even new techniques. However, as a massage therapist/future manual osteopath, my focus remains on the joints, soft-tissues, and improvement of flow in the body. The restoration of health in the physical realm will impact on the person's general health and emotional well-being, and with that said, the

patient can live his life to his fullest potential. Within the short period of time I have been able to blend both therapies, I have already seen very promising results.

So where will I go from here now that my osteopathic program is complete? I will continue to learn throughout my career and broaden my knowledge in the field of manual therapies always looking to provide the best treatment for my patients. What a gift to possess the ability to help another human heal themselves-I am truly very fortunate and look forward to sharing my gift as long as I possibly can.

*Health is a state of complete harmony of the body, mind and spirit.
When one is free from physical disabilities and mental distractions, the
gates of the soul open. ~ B.K. S. Iyengar*

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