

One of Medicine's Best-Kept Secrets

Dr. Andrew Weil refers to Osteopathic Physicians as the “go to” doctor for the most puzzling cases of stubborn illness and chronic pain.

The Harvard-trained M.D. was the first nationally recognized figure to investigate the effectiveness of a specialty that remains largely unknown to the public, Osteopathy in the Cranial Field. Like most patients, Dr. Weil found himself “ignorant” about this field of manual medicine (hands-on treatment), which he described as a complex system of musculoskeletal medicine. The attempts Dr. Weil made to learn the answers to perplexing health problems, which had not responded to allopathic (standard) medicine, brought him to numerous exotic countries: Ironically he believed he had stumbled onto something “fantastic” in his own backyard— meaning Tucson, AZ.

In case after case, Dr. Weil witnessed an osteopath's successful treatment of common medical problems—from chronic earaches in children to back pain in adults—and he detailed his findings in *The New York Times* bestseller *Spontaneous Healing*. It appeared that an osteopath's ability to detect the underlying abnormalities that triggered health problems accounted for his colleague's success in resolving the more puzzling health disorders, Dr. Weil wrote.

Today, osteopaths are enjoying an unprecedented surge of interest from the public in non-invasive medicine. The doctors have been the subject of increased media reports, including articles in some of the nation's most prestigious publications. The *New York Times* recently featured a medical article headlined “Osteopathy Proves Effective for Back Pain,” based on a non-profit study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Moreover, this once-anonymous profession is now on the public's radar, as determined patients seek the best resolutions to their health problems.

Are You A Real Doctor?

Patients often ask osteopathic physicians: “Are you an M.D.?” or “Are you a real doctor?” The answer is simple: D.O.s (doctors of osteopathy) and M.D.s (medical

doctors) share the same licensing privileges, which authorize them to prescribe medication and perform surgery.

Attending separate medical schools, osteopaths actually train 300 to 500 additional hours in the study of the body's musculoskeletal system before graduating. Doctors specializing in osteopathic manual medicine (OMM) are required to train five additional years to be eligible for certification by the Cranial Academy, a nonprofit medical society founded to educate and advance the osteopathic profession.

What Do You Do & How Does Treatment Work?

Osteopaths view the body as a road map to health problems and can actually palpate (feel) the body's living anatomy. Meaning the doctors are able to trace abnormalities that may fail to show up on x-rays, such as overly tight membranes, restrictions in cerebrospinal fluid, subtle abnormalities of the cranial bones (etc.).

The application of this training is not always obvious, even to the patient in treatment. Using the simplest of examples, one patient asked her osteopath: "Why are you treating my knee when I came in with ankle pain?" The doctor explained that the connective tissue (fascia) stretching from her ankle to her knee felt like a "tangled telephone cord," and the strains needed to be alleviated or the pain would persist.

Sometimes osteopaths are referred to as "surgeons without knives" because of their ability to affect the mechanics of the body and impact fundamental change. The point of treatment is to address the abnormalities triggering illness which includes: improve flow of bodily fluids (even bones contain fluid), alleviate dysfunction in tissues, relieve compression in the bones, etc. For generations, osteopathic physicians have taken advantage of the body's innate ability to strive toward a state of health (homeostasis).

It is common-sense medicine, say osteopaths, that the body is a unit made up of interrelated parts. The physical disturbances that settle into a body are unique in every patient—despite whatever all-encompassing name allopathic (conventional) medicine have given their disease.

Common illnesses treated include:

Dental

- Orthodontic Problems
- TMJ Syndrome
- Malocclusion

Digestive

- Constipation Syndrome
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Nausea

Ear, Nose, and Throat

- Chronic Ear Infections
- Chronic Tonsillitis
- Sinusitis

Genetic

- Congenital

Malformations

- Down

Genitourinary

- Bedwetting
- Prostatitis
- Stress Incontinence

Neurological

- Dizziness and Vertigo
- Head Trauma
- Migraine Headaches
- Post-concussion Syndrome
- Post-MVA Inertial Injury (Whiplash)
- Seizures

- Visual Disturbances

Orthopedic

- Kyphosis
- Lordosis
- Postural Imbalances

Pediatric

- ADD, ADHD
- Autism
- Behavioral Problems
- Cerebral Palsy
- Colic
- Developmental Delays
- Failure to Thrive
- Learning

Disorders

- Otitis Media (Ear Infections)
- Plagiocephaly (Misshapen Head)
- Spitting Up
- Strabismus (Crossed Eyes or Lazy Eye)
- Sucking Difficulties

Pregnancy

- Back Pain
- Groin Pain
- Varicose Veins
- Prevention of Labor Problems

Psychiatric

- Anxiety

- Depression

- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
- Sleep Disturbances

Respiratory

- Allergies
- Asthma
- Bronchitis
- Frequent Colds
- Flu
- Recurrent Sore Throats

Somatic Problems

- Rheumatic Problems
- Arthritis
- Polymyalgia
- Fibromyalgia

Theory Behind Osteopathy

Civil War Surgeon Andrew Still was a century ahead of his colleagues in his discovery that the entire structure of the body was interrelated and dysfunction in any one area impacts all parts. Then, as now, physicians failed to understand why certain illnesses persisted. They focused on the disease (symptoms) rather than the underlying cause for the condition.

For his efforts, Dr. Still was ostracized by other physicians, and he was further estranged by the medical community for his refusal to administer the standard of care at the time: purging, leeching and calomel dosing (poisoning) of patients.

In the 1930s, another osteopathic physician proved advanced for his time. Dr. William G. Sutherland distinguished himself with his sophisticated understanding of the body's mechanical functions. He theorized that the body's interrelated parts—the circulatory system, nervous system, and skeletal apparatus—had one more essential component, the “cranial mechanism.” This included the inherent rhythmic motion of cranial bones, which he considered vital to overall health.

It would take more than a half century before advanced medical imaging could validate the basic tenets of Drs. Still and Sutherland: that the body's entire structure, including the brain and spinal cord and their surrounding membranes and fluids, has an inherent rhythmic motion, as vital as breathing. If this movement were obstructed (whether by car accident or birth trauma), it could have serious ramifications on overall health.

What to Expect in Treatment

In the bestseller *Spontaneous Healing*, Dr. Weil wrote he was “disappointed” after his first treatment, believing a modality “so gentle” could not have been effective in addressing his chronic pain.

That is why he was surprised to find the treatment had resolved his chronic shoulder pain. Shortly after his initial visits, Dr. Weil experienced a trauma to his face that left him with jaw pain, but an x-ray revealed nothing. His osteopath, however, found trauma to the tissues and was able to successfully treat the condition.

Given the gentle nature of treatment, patients are asked to keep in mind the amount of force used is not commensurate with the level of effectiveness. In most cases, treatment does not involve any jarring, cracking, or crunching of body parts.

Still, patients often report experiencing effects from treatment that may include a feeling of light-headedness (due to increased flow of fluids); increased thirst (the body's

attempt to detoxify); and a deep feeling of relaxation or tiredness (allowing the body to self-heal). Doctors typically provide a list of instructions to help each patient maximize the benefits of treatment.

How Long Before I'm Better?

Many patients ask how long it will take to treat asthma or chronic fatigue, believing the condition dictates the length of treatment rather than the state of the patient's health. Much depends on the patient's level of vitality (i.e., immune system strength).

Generally, a patient in good health will respond more quickly to treatment than a patient with a severely weakened immune system. That is why physicians advise patients that the ratio is roughly one month of treatment for every year of chronic illness. The course of treatment is shorter for acute cases such as flu or muscle strain because the condition is not as deep-rooted as a chronic illness. Osteopaths tell patients that "deep cure" takes time; some patients must wait one or two months before experiencing a significant change, while others notice an immediate change.

Many patients believe nothing has happened in treatment until experiencing improved health several days or weeks later.

Growing Popularity of Osteopathy

Since its inception in the 1860s, osteopathic medicine has always attracted a faithful core group of patients. In more recent years, the specialty has changed the lives of such well-known figures as speed skating's Olympic gold medalist Apolo Ohno, actors Sir Sean Connery and Martin Sheen, General Norman Schwarzkopf, industrialist John D. Rockefeller, and Presidents Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, and John Kennedy.

The *New York Times* recently cited osteopathic medicine as one of the fastest growing medical professions in the U.S. This trend is reflected in the increased interest of practitioners in more than 17 countries on four continents specializing in osteopathic medicine (see the Cranial Academy Web site at www.CranialAcademy.org for a world-wide directory of practitioners).