

Understanding Osteopathy....What is OMT?

Osteopathic medicine is a distinctive form of medical care founded on the philosophy that all body systems are interrelated and dependent upon one another for good health. This philosophy was developed in 1874 by Dr. Andrew Taylor Still, who pioneered the concept of "wellness" and recognized the importance of treating illness within the context of the whole body.

Osteopathic physicians use all of the tools available through modern medicine including prescription medicine and surgery. They also incorporate osteopathic manipulative medicine/ osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMM / OMT) into their regimen of patient care when appropriate. OMM is a set of manual medicine techniques that may be used to diagnose illness and injury, relieve pain, restore range of motion, and enhance the body's capacity to heal.

In the United States, Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine (DOs) are fully trained physicians, licensed to practice the entire range and scope of medicine and surgery. US trained DOs attend their own medical schools, receive the same post-graduate training as their MD colleagues, and receive additional education in the principles of osteopathy, applied in practice as osteopathic manipulative treatment.

Osteopathy is a system of medicine that recognizes the dynamic relationship of structure and function in health and disease. Only US trained DO's can be licensed to practice osteopathic medicine in the USA.

Osteopathic Principles focus on the natural motion within the body's structure and its relationship to function. The DO learns how to restore health by applying osteopathic principles in the practice of hands-on treatment. Osteopathic knowledge and treatment considers the musculoskeletal system to be an extremely important but often neglected aspect of total health. It must also be emphasized that osteopathy considers the inter-relationships of all physiologic systems (e.g., neurological, respiratory, digestive, etc.).

Cranial Osteopathy is an expansion of the general principles of osteopathy which includes a special understanding of the central nervous system and a mechanism called primary respiration. Those who wish to practice Cranial Osteopathy train intensively through post-graduate studies. A Certificate of Proficiency may be earned by members of The Osteopathic Cranial Academy who demonstrate clinical ability in Osteopathy in the Cranial Field.

Currently, there are more than 50,000 DOs practicing in the United States. Reflecting the osteopathic philosophy of treating the whole person, many DOs serve in the primary care areas of family medicine, general internal medicine, and pediatrics, often establishing their practices in medically underserved areas. But many others are found in a wide range of medical specialties including surgery, anesthesiology, sports medicine, geriatrics, and emergency medicine. Still others serve as health care policy leaders at the local, state, and national levels. In addition, an increasing emphasis on biomedical research at several of the osteopathic colleges has expanded opportunities for DOs interested in pursuing careers in medical research.

Osteopathic Beginnings...

Andrew Taylor Still was born in Virginia in 1828, the son of a Methodist minister and physician. At an early age, Still decided to follow in his father's footsteps as a physician. After studying medicine and serving an apprenticeship under his father, Still became a licensed MD in the state of Missouri. Later, in the early 1860s, he completed additional coursework at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Kansas City, Missouri. He went on to serve as a surgeon in the Union Army during the Civil War.

After the Civil War and following the death of three of his children from spinal meningitis in 1864, Still concluded that the orthodox medical practices of his day were frequently ineffective, and sometimes harmful. He devoted the next ten years of his life to studying the human body and finding better ways to treat disease.

His research and clinical observations led him to believe that the musculoskeletal system played a vital role in health and disease and that the body contained all of the elements needed to maintain health, if properly stimulated. Still believed that by correcting problems in the body's structure, through the use of manual techniques now known as osteopathic manipulative treatment, the body's ability to function and to heal itself could be greatly improved. He also promoted the idea of preventive medicine and endorsed the philosophy that physicians should focus on treating the whole patient, rather than just the disease.

These beliefs formed the basis of a new medical approach, osteopathic medicine. Based on this philosophy, Dr. Still opened the first school of osteopathic medicine in Kirksville, Missouri in 1892.