



Osteopathy: Medicine of body, mind and spirit

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Osteopathic medicine is still relatively new to California, so it's not surprising if you have not heard of it or don't really know what it means.

Osteopathic medicine -- sometimes referred to as osteopathy -- is actually much more prevalent and well known on the East Coast and in the Midwest, where it has taken its place alongside traditional "allopathic" medicine. However, having survived several very difficult and contentious years in the 1960s, the osteopathic medical profession has steadily grown and developed throughout California. The practice of osteopathic medicine today is just as "mainstream" as any accredited medical practice.

What is Osteopathic medicine?

Osteopathic medicine is all about treating the whole body, including hands-on treatment and diagnosis of conditions.

As doctors of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.), we are trained with an emphasis on a holistic approach. Although we are fully qualified medical doctors, our training also teaches us that there is an interdependence of body, mind and spirit. We believe in a strong relationship between body structure and function, and that the human body has innate tendency to heal itself.

When a patient comes to see me, for example, I try not to focus only on his or her complaint. I also consider other factors, such as what else is going on in the patient's life emotionally, family history and background, and whether they'll have any resistance to certain treatment recommendations, such as cultural or financial barriers. These are factors that -- even though they may not be directly or medically related to the condition at hand -- can definitely affect how the patient reacts to my recommended treatment.

For example, when a patient presents with persistent lower back pain, I may consider alternatives such as manipulation of the spine and physical therapy, thereby avoiding prescription muscle relaxants or pain killers. Of course, a thorough physical history and exam are still routine in such cases, and my medical training demands that I consider and eliminate other more serious or unusual issues or diseases that might be going on.

Common misconceptions

Some confusion still arises about osteopathic medicine because of the name itself. People tend to confuse osteopathy with homeopathy, naturopathy, and chiropractic care, or use these terms interchangeably, which is why I prefer to use the term "osteopathic medicine."

The word osteopathy originally comes from the Greek word for bone, but osteopathy today is really more than a branch of medicine that focuses just on bones and spinal structure manipulation. Homeopathy and naturopathy have little relationship to osteopathic medicine; neither requires a medical degree that allows surgery or prescription writing.

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