

Editor's note: *Dr. Mills is an Academy Associate member and has practiced pediatrics at Young Peoples Clinic in Tulsa for 10 Years. She has three children, Bryan Richardson, age 15; Patrick Richardson, age 12; and Julia Mills, age 2 1/2.*

After 15 years of teaching at MD Medical schools, such as where I trained, I'm going back to class myself.

Every Tuesday, I stop in the middle of my busiest day at the office and go to the osteopathic medical college here in Tulsa to join the first year students learning about osteopathic manipulative treatment.

Why would I be interested in relearning long-forgotten anatomy, because these techniques -- high touch in an era of high-teck -work often where other treatments do not.

I first became interested in the field after a car accident, for which I sought pain relief from a DO. I was amazed at how little medication I required and how quickly I was able to return to work.

The same doctor helped me when I was passing a kidney stone and treated me during

my over-40 pregnancy, helping me have an easy vaginal delivery after two C-sections.

Now that my patients know I have an interest in this field, many share with me that they seek "alternative" treatment for themselves, be it from a massage therapist, a chiropractor or an acupuncturist.

MD medical school s have begun to take this phenomena seriously. I recently attended a course at Harvard on the mind-body connection. They discussed the use of the "relaxation response" as an important component in the treatment of chronic pain, hypertension, ulcers, headaches and cancer.

During the past 20 years or so, the lines between MDs and DOs have been blurred, but certainly not been obliterated.

The osteopathic perspective, among other things, is considered a "holistic" approach which emphasizes the body's innate capacity to heal itself.

One of the many ways to help the body feel better and function more effectively is

to provide it with better mobility, relieve painful stiffness, facilitate relaxation and encourage symmetric function.

One principle behind this approach is if all the body parts are more freely mobile, the whole system works better: the blood flow, nerve conduction, lymph drainage, intestinal motility, the energy available to fight infection, the ability to relax and get a good night's sleep and so on.

To achieve this end, the physician develops sensitivity in his or her hands and eyes to pick up subtle clues from the tissues telling where the body holds restrictions and what to do to free them.

Such terms as strain counterstrain, myofascial release muscle energy balancing and craniosacral manipulation describe some of the many techniques used to mobilize the body's innate healing capacity.

These techniques are not as simplistic as "laying on of hands," but can be almost a magical when applied by an experienced practitioner.

There is a long-standing attitude however, among

many people, that the benefits of manipulation are overinflated or potentially dangerous.

Interestingly, the more intimidating popping and cracking techniques one might associate with manipulation are often not necessary, or even indicated in young children.

Furthermore, in the hands of a physician trained to diagnose and treat in a more "traditional"; manner (e.g. surgery, x-ray diagnosis, antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals), a patient is unlikely to find manipulative treatment recommended when another is indicated. For one thing, it is more time-consuming.

So how do you decide what sort of treatment to seek, and who would be reputable and trustworthy to treat your children? The same way you choose any healthcare provider -- check out their credentials and ask others about their reputation.

Practitioners require training and practice and there are certification requirements to be passed. I have taken about 100 hours of training over the past 2 years in one of the techniques, called

craniosacral manipulation, and I still have much to learn.

This particular technique is especially useful in children because it's so gentle. It's also difficult to learn because it's so subtle.

Nonetheless, I have surprised myself in seeing its usefulness in the treatment of colic, headaches, chronic sinus congestion, recurrent ear infections and asthma.

It will never replace antibiotics or surgery, but is helpful in providing and even reducing the requirements for medication.

As a parent, you might ask to be treated yourself, and see how it feels. Bring your child along so he or she can watch and you can see how the physician interacts with your child. Talk to other parents whose children have the same problem.

Above all, beware the claims of "cure-all" guarantees. No Medical technique is foolproof.

Finally, get another opinion if any practitioner recommends against what seems to be good sense to you, such as giving childhood immunizations.

Because of the confusion that can arise from not knowing what to recommend, I decided to find out from the inside, learning the techniques myself and working with the people who do them.

I'm a grateful and privileged student, who has been made to feel welcomed by my osteopathic colleagues. The more I learn, the more useful I can be to my patients, and that's why I'm in this business.

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