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Healing Outside the Margins  
The Survivor's Guide to  
Integrative Cancer Care  
by Carole O'Toole

**P**eople often assume that osteopathy is outside the boundaries of conventional medicine. From its beginnings, however, osteopathy has exemplified integrative medicine, combining allopathic teachings and methods with a holistic approach and unconventional modalities.

Osteopathic medicine was originally developed by an American allopathic physician, Andrew Taylor Still, M.D., in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, who saw the need to treat individuals in a more holistic fashion. The practice of osteopathy is founded on three basic principles: the recognition of the body's own capacity to heal itself, the interrelationship of structure and function in the body, and the treatment of the body as a whole.

Doctors of osteopathy (D.O.s) are fully trained as physicians and surgeons, but undergo additional training in osteopathic techniques. This enables them to provide a multifaceted approach to health care. Many D.O.s practice as general or family practitioners, but may also specialize in any of the recognized medical and surgical specialties, including radiology, surgery, and oncology. They practice in much the same fashion as allopathic physicians in addition to offering complementary treatment options, including manual therapy techniques.

■ HOW IT HELPS ■

One major goal of osteopathy is to improve the structure and functioning of the musculoskeletal system,

which is thought to support the body's innate healing abilities.

Osteopathy assumes that disturbances in the musculoskeletal system can affect function throughout the body, thereby affecting how the body works. As a result, many D.O.s give particular attention to the body's mechanics and its interrelationships. When appropriate, the physician may use hands-on treatment to help the body restore normal function.

Because of its focus, osteopathy is a valuable approach for chronic pain, mobility problems, and postsurgical healing. Osteopathic treatment helps to restore normal circulation, nerve function, and muscle and joint activity. It can play a role in nourishing tissues, improving movement, and reducing side effects from cancer or cancer treatments. Patients who have had surgery, for example, may receive osteopathic treatments to increase blood flow, decrease pain, and increase mobility. In addition, osteopathic treatment has been reported to benefit immune system functioning, reduce stress, and improve overall well-being.

Research has shown that osteopathic manipulations can help relieve lower back pain while reducing the need for medications. For those with cancer or other long-term illnesses, for whom imbalances in body posture can result in additional discomfort, this approach may help to improve mobility and reduce pain, with less risk of side effects.

Because of the holistic approach of osteopathy, osteopaths are more likely to place considerable emphasis on nutrition, exercise, stress reduction, and lifestyle issues that can help patients overcome discomfort, impart some control over their illnesses, and have more satisfaction in their daily lives.

## ■ WHAT TO EXPECT ■

Because osteopaths are trained in conventional medicine, an office visit will include many of the same features as a visit with a mainstream doctor. The osteopath will begin by taking a complete medical history, which is followed by a physical examination, and, if needed, medical tests.

Once a diagnosis is made, the treatments can vary widely. Depending on the condition, patients may be given a prescription for medications or other treatments, along with advice on self-care. Some osteopaths incorporate herbs and supplements in their practices. If appropriate, the doctor may perform an osteopathic treatment at the time of the initial visit.\*

The patient lies on an examination table and the physician uses gentle manipulation to lessen any muscular or skeletal restriction, and to restore the body's natural balance and motion. Often the whole body is treated, not just the problem area. Some osteopathic physicians incorporate traditional physical medicine treatments, such as ultrasound or hot packs. More specific mobilizations are sometimes employed as well.

Most people find the treatments very relaxing; treatment effects can result in long-term relief or a reduction in symptoms. In addition to treatment, considerable value is placed on education of the patient, including strategies for prevention. Patients may be taught exercises for better breathing, posture, relaxation, or stress reduction, or receive nutritional advice.

\* As with other complementary modalities, in certain situations, such as metastatic cancer, advanced osteoporosis, and certain types of arthritis, direct forms of osteopathic manipulative treatment [OMT] may not be indicated.

## ■ TRAINING ■

Medical training for osteopathic physicians is essentially the same as for allopathic physicians. The requirements for a D.O. degree include successful completion of four years of osteopathic medical school, board examinations, and a one-year rotating internship through the primary care areas of medicine. Many choose a residency of two to six years in a specialty area in either a D.O. or M.D. hospital. The American Osteopathic Association (AOA) is the national accrediting organization for osteopathic medicine. There are currently nineteen accredited schools of osteopathic medicine in the United States. Osteopathic physicians' licensing requirements are very similar to those of allopathic physicians and they are fully licensed in every state as physicians and surgeons. They are allowed to dispense the same range of services and are covered by health insurance.

## MY APPROACH

**Harold Goodman, D.O., is an osteopathic physician who offers homeopathy, osteopathy, acupuncture, and energy healing at his practice in Silver Spring, Maryland.**

"I believe that most of what is labeled health care in this country actually concentrates on combating disease. My approach instead concentrates on health. I work to foster and support health in a hands-on, direct fashion. As Andrew Still, the founder of osteopathy, wrote in the 1870s, 'The object of the doctor should be to find health; any fool can find disease.'

"I strive to find those places where proper functioning is impaired because of energy blockages or other causes. I encourage the system with my hands and other methods to restore optimum functioning of the person as a whole. This results in an overall feeling of vitality as well as frequent elimination of many different symptoms, such as pain and fatigue.

## ■ TREATMENTS FROM TOP PRACTITIONERS ■

**Lisa Chun, D.O., is an osteopathic physician who incorporates cranial osteopathy in her practice in Puhai, Hawaii.**

### *Treatment Goals*

According to Dr. Chun, the physical body can be a reflection of a person's response to both internal and external stressors. "I try to present a forum for optimal functioning and health," she says. "The modality I use supports a person's vitality during and following cancer. It can result in a conscious effect on a person's understanding of his or her true self, thereby contributing to healing."

### *Treatment Session*

Dr. Chun's intake session averages one hour and begins with a traditional medical and surgical history. She also

"There is a spirit of health to be found in every cell, in every part of the body. Once the impediments to health have been removed, benefits such as increased energy, decreased symptoms, overall improvement of body functioning, and increased vitality and sense of well-being can be felt almost immediately.

"Cancer touches us where we live. It brings up all kinds of anxiety, fears, doubts, judgments, and other states of mind that block healing. There is a way of going beyond all this: The feeling of peace, and the clarity that comes out of this experience, set the stage for true healing on all levels. I call this spiritual or metaphysical healing. It has nothing to do with a person's religious belief systems, nor is it psychotherapy or an attempt to intellectually understand the emotions. It is probably the most powerful and transformational healing experience I share with patients."

pays particular attention to what many people would consider minor traumas. She conducts an osteopathic palpatory evaluation, and sometimes begins treatment right away, depending on the individual's circumstances. Follow-up sessions are usually thirty minutes long.

Generally, Dr. Chun's patients remain clothed during treatment. She treats most patients lying down on an examination table, but can work on individuals in a standing or sitting position. Her treatment involves an extremely light physical touch to the body. Because cranial manipulation is so gentle, patients' reports range from "feeling nothing" to some warmth or a feeling of release in the body. Dr. Chun also may choose to use active massage and muscle stretching or movement of vertebral segments. As a fully licensed physician, she has the option to use (or suggest) medicines, surgery, and other technical modalities, as well as alternative treatments.

The typical response to her treatments is one of relaxation. Some patients report experiencing fatigue or an exacerbation of presenting systems, but these usually subside within twenty-four hours. Children may have the opposite reaction and become hyperactive following a treatment session, but this also subsides within a few hours.

Rest, water, gentle stretching and breathing exercises, and no overexertion for twenty-four hours are recommended following treatment. Dr. Chun generally likes to see patients weekly for four weeks. Treatment is highly individual; each person is constantly reevaluated based on treatment response. Dr. Chun encourages time between treatments in order to allow for some assimilation. Many patients schedule treatments on an as-needed basis.

### *Benefits to Cancer Patients*

According to Dr. Chun, "abnormal stress can be constructive or destructive. In either case, a heightened physiological response occurs. Prolonged, this can result in physiological and anatomical impairment, not to mention mental, emotional, and physical fatigue."

Osteopathic manipulation addresses these anatomical and physiological changes, strengthening and enhancing the immune system and other related body systems. Her treatment can also help relieve swelling, scarring, poor sleep, or impaired circulation or breathing.

### *Compatibility with Conventional Therapy*

Cranial osteopathy and other osteopathic treatments are compatible with conventional cancer therapy, Dr. Chun says. However, she advises patients to allow twenty-four hours between her treatments and conventional treatment because it takes the body time to adapt to the changes that occur during treatment sessions.

*Michael J. Porvaznik, D.O., is an osteopathic physician and assistant professor of family medicine who maintains a private practice in Arlington, Virginia.*

### *Treatment Goals*

Dr. Porvaznik employs a variety of osteopathic techniques to facilitate healing in his patients. "I help to restore motion in the tissues, the body, and the whole person," he says. "When I use craniosacral techniques, I am actually interfacing energetic medicine with the physical system. I try to be open to patients and listen to what is going on for them without prying. If there are important emotional issues that come up in treatment sessions that a patient does not want to discuss, I refer to a therapist."

While Dr. Porvaznik believes osteopathy offers a lot to

cancer patients, he is open to coordinating care with other modalities. He notes that with his patients, "I am not concerned with *who* gets them well as much as that they *get* well. If problems are chronic and persistent, I sometimes work with other practitioners and integrate the patient's care."

### *Treatment Session*

Dr. Porvaznik's initial evaluation lasts about one hour. It consists of a thorough discussion of the presenting concern, as well as the patient's medical history.

The initial exam consists of a complete evaluation, with the patient standing, sitting, and lying down. Dr. Porvaznik looks for symmetry or asymmetry of bony landmarks, tissue quality and texture, as well as range and quality of motion of the extremities, vertebrae, pelvis, and other areas. He also evaluates the craniosacral system for its quality of motion, which involves assessing the cranial bones, sacrum, dural membranes, cerebrospinal fluid, and central nervous system.

"The osteopathic techniques improve motion and relieve restrictions of movement throughout the body," he says. "They are generally gentle, nonforceful techniques."

Follow-up treatments usually last thirty minutes. There may not be an immediate response to initial treatment, but often improvement comes within one to two sessions.

### *Benefits to Cancer Patients*

Osteopathic manipulation is very helpful for cancer patients because it improves circulation and brings more nutrients to the cells, says Dr. Porvaznik. "It also improves lymphatic circulation, which carries toxic wastes from the cells. There is reduction in pain in areas that were restricted, and also an improved sense of overall well-being."

Osteopathic manipulation is similar to acupuncture in that it helps to restore balance and enables the body to function more efficiently, he adds. "It frees up energy that is being held by tension in the body. People often find that they sleep better, and it's not uncommon for other, seemingly unrelated problems to improve."

### *Compatibility with Conventional Treatment*

Osteopathic manipulation works well with conventional therapies. Dr. Porvaznik often coordinates care with conventional physicians, noting that many of his referrals come from physicians who are aware of osteopathy's unique benefits.

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The AOA will direct you to your state osteopathic association to find osteopaths in your area. Contact the AOA at:

The American Osteopathic Association  
142 East Ontario Street  
Chicago, IL 60611  
1(800) 621-1773  
[www.aoa-net.org](http://www.aoa-net.org)

The American Academy of Osteopathy provides a listing of D.O.s, identifying those who use osteopathic manual techniques in their practice. Contact the academy at:

The American Academy of Osteopathy  
3500 DePauw Boulevard, Suite 1080  
Indianapolis, IN 46268-1136  
(317) 879-1881  
[www.academyofosteopathy.org](http://www.academyofosteopathy.org)

The Cranial Academy, a component society of the AAO, provides referrals to physicians with a special focus in cranial osteopathy. (See the

discussion on craniosacral therapy in the Bodywork chapter.) You can contact the Academy at:

The Cranial Academy  
8202 Clearvista Parkway, Suite 9-D  
Indianapolis, IN 46256  
(317) 594-0411  
www.cranialacademy.org

#### BOOKS RECOMMENDED BY HEALERS

*Dr. Fulford's Touch of Life: The Healing Power of the Natural Life Force.* Robert C. Fulford with Gene Stone (New York: Pocket Books, 1996).

*The Philosophy and Mechanical Principles of Osteopathy.* Andrew Taylor Still (Kansas City, Missouri: Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Co., 1902).

*Philosophy of Osteopathy.* Andrew Taylor Still (Kirksville, Missouri: A.T. Still, 1899).

*Teachings in the Science of Osteopathy.* William Garner Sutherland (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Rudra Press, 1990).

**T**hose who have lived through cancer often perceive it as a wake-up call, an opportunity for growth or transformation, or a path that leads to a new life. Cancer can trigger the quest for a greater understanding and connection to spirituality: a search for self, for deeper meaning in life, and the profound experience of coming to terms with mortality. I share this view, having found that the spiritual journey initiated by my own illness had a profound impact on the way I healed.

Everyone who experiences cancer faces a basic decision: to find out whether you can embrace the illness as a friend and teacher. One premise I have heard used frequently by healers is that cancer pertains to abundant growth—that cancer is the physical manifestation of this underlying growth energy based in the spirit. Cancer, then, can be interpreted as an opportunity to examine your spirit and find those areas of your life where your growth needs to be expressed.

This growth energy calls each person in an individual way. The opportunities for spiritual growth afforded by cancer require a connection to the basic underlying energy behind the disease. Because this energy is very subtle, most people are not experienced in accessing it and forming a relationship with it. Moreover, its physical manifestation as cancer is threatening to most of us. It can prevent us from seeing cancer in any way other than as “the enemy.” But doing so denies you the richest, most vital