

# We Believe in Touching People

While many osteopathic physicians do not use manual medicine as a primary means of treatment, in the words of Harvard Researcher and M. D. Andrew Weil, “Manipulation seems to me a good technique to know. I wish I had learned it in medical school. It can be a valuable addition to a doctor's therapeutic repertory, both because it involves a laying on of hands that can foster productive relationships with patients, and because it may improve the circulation of blood and nervous energy to ailing parts of the body.”

Furthermore, the importance of the skeletal system is underrated by allopaths, and even by orthopedists, who are supposed to be scientific experts on bones. It is important to note that chiropractors restrict their manipulation to the spine, while osteopathic physicians work on all joints, even the "relatively immobile" joints of the cranium.

Doctors of osteopathy are trained extensively in the treatment of body structure in order to assist the body in releasing its own unique healing capabilities. However, hands-on healing therapies date back to early Hebrew, Egyptian, and Oriental practices. The ancient Mayans and Incas of South America also utilized methods of joint manipulation.

Hippocrates stated, “Get thee knowledge of the spine for this is the requisite of understanding many diseases.” As far back as 4 B.C. Aesclepiades noted the relationships between touch and healing physiological consequences.

In the 16th Century Ambroise Pare, a brilliant French surgeon began to employ massage techniques for joint stiffness and wound healing after surgery. In 1911 English orthopedist Sir Robert Jones and his contemporary James B. Mennell summarized the mechanical benefits of manipulation as, “assisting in the venous return of blood to the heart, aiding lymph movement out of tissues, stretching the connective tissues, and stimulating the internal organs.”

Clinical and experimental evidence indicate that connective tissue can be altered through deep tactile pressure and stretching. This has several practical applications:

1. Treating muscular “contractures” following long periods of immobility.
2. Increasing the range of motion in joints after muscle strain or joint strain.
3. Breaking down of scar tissue caused by trauma (e.g. whiplash or surgery).

Hence, manual medicine can be used not only to treat disease but also to invoke health. Throughout history, silent and spoken prayer has been combined with the laying on of hands as a healing technique in many religions and societies. Dolores Krieger, nurse and researcher, demonstrated in controlled studies that the use of intentional and empathetic touch can raise hemoglobin levels in hospital patients. Famous studies conducted in World War II found that infants who were deprived of touch not only "failed to thrive," but when deprived of touch for extensive periods of time, died.

In summary, the human body is a unique and complex organism which not only seems to respond to “The Healing Power of Touch,” but also seems to need it in order to thrive.

Excerpts from: *Health and Healing*, by Andrew Weil, MD and *Healing Through Touch* by John T. Cottingham.