

# An Osteopathic Response To Acute Illness

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My practice experience in dealing with acute illnesses has been a varied response to treatment. In my 17 years of treating patients, I have observed a vast array of responses from patients.

This paper explains, and attempts to categorize, the significance of the varied responses by drawing on my general medical knowledge and clinical observations.

As osteopathic physicians we work with a patient or health oriented system of medicine, even though much of our education and a large part of the world deals with a disease oriented system. These two systems can clash and offer different interpretations of the same phenomena.

To illustrate, a 62 year old female patient presented to my office complaining of lethargy and early onset of throat soreness. She was anxious about contracting the flu because 3 members of her family were convalescing from this illness. She stated that all three reported the illness beginning with the same symptoms as hers with the illness persisting for 3-5 days.

She was evaluated and treated. Shortly after she left the office she had onset of a fever, body aches, with intensified lethargy and throat soreness.

Was this poor treatment? Did I miss something? Did I do my patient a miservice?

Her body responded well upon being treated, and on leaving my office appeared to function well on all levels I was able to perceive. She denied any type of trauma after leaving the office. When questioned about the length of her illness she said that her symptoms lasted 1 day in duration and that she was functioning normally, without residual symptoms, in two days.

By my interpretation, this was a very good response (see Fig. 4).

I will describe a simple model explaining the body's different responses to treatment of acute illness.

Chronic and acute illnesses have a totally different pace and the body expends a different amount of energy with regard to each, i.e., the body mobilizes more forces and in a more rapid fashion in response to an acute illness. Chronic illnesses affect the body more slowly and over a longer period of time.

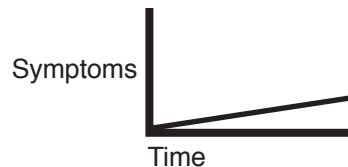


Fig. 1 The pace of a typical chronic illness.

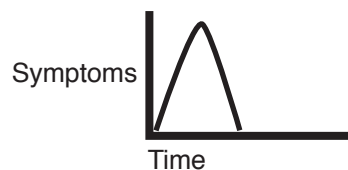


Fig. 2 The pace of a "normal" acute illness.

My practice experience has taught me that there are usually 4 types of responses that one can expect when treating an acute illness (Assuming Osteopathic treatment is administered in an appropriate fashion by a skilled practitioner). Of these 4 main responses listed below, it is obvious that numbers 1 and 2 are favorable. But what about 3 and 4? Are they necessarily a bad response?

1) The patients symptoms are greatly ameliorated or cured.

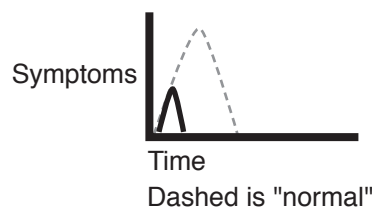


Fig. 3 Ameliorated symptoms

The pace of the treatment matched that of the disease and appropriate areas were treated, allowing the body (immune system) to respond appropriately and fully overcome the illness. The duration of the acute illness and the intensity of the symptoms were dramatically decreased. This is the response both we and our patients prefer. The treatment is strong enough and the

response is excellent.

Rx.: Do nothing

## 2) The patients symptoms are partially ameliorated.

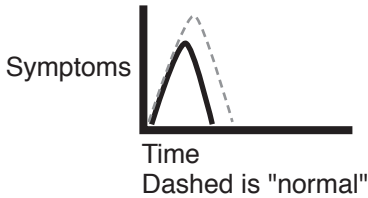


Fig. 4 Partially ameliorated symptoms.

The pace of the treatment was not quite as great as that of the expression of the disease in the host. The duration and/or intensity of the symptoms in the acute illness will be reduced. The patient did not respond optimally due to one or a number of the following:

- a) Decreased ability to respond.

The patient's immune system is slightly weakened so the full response of the patient was not strong enough.

- b) The stimulus from treatment was not strong enough.

Either the treatment was too short, appropriate areas were not treated fully, or the patient just needs more treatment due to the quality of the acute illness.

- c) Moderate to strong pace of the acute illness.

The pace of the acute illness was so strong that even though the treatment and the patient's ability to respond were both good they could not totally keep up with the pace of the illness.

Rx.: More treatment to support the immune system.

## 3) There is seemingly no response.

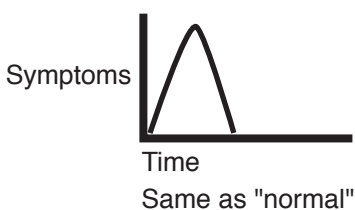


Fig. 5 No response.

The pace of the illness was much stronger than the expression of the disease in the host. The duration and/or intensity of the symptoms in the acute illness are unchanged. Generally these are very strong acute illnesses with symptoms coming on at a fast pace and can temporarily "ravage" the body. The patient did not respond due to one or a number of the following:

- a) Decreased ability to respond.

The patient's immune system is moderately to strongly compromised so there was little response from the patient after treatment.

- b) The stimulus from treatment was not strong enough.

Either the treatment was too short, appropriate areas were not treated fully, or the frequency of treatment is too short due to the quality of the acute illness.

- c) Strong pace of the acute illness.

The pace of the acute illness was such that even though the treatment and the patient's ability to respond were both good it could not match the fast pace of the illness.

Rx.: More frequent treatment, supportive measures, and possible inclusion of another modality (to help match the furious pace of the illness).

This type of response is one in which to be concerned. Watch this patient closely as occasionally their health can deteriorate into a crisis situation.

## 4) The patients symptoms appear worse or aggravated.

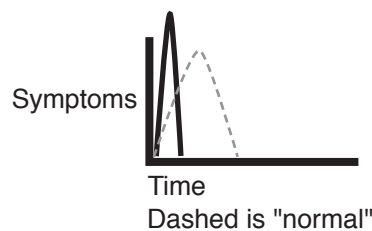


Fig. 6 Aggravated symptoms.

The pace of the treatment did not match that of the

expression of the disease in the host but was strong enough to stimulate the immune system. This is a good response, even though you or your patients may not think so. The duration of the acute illness is shortened and the intensity of the symptoms are increased as if the symptoms were compressed. The treatment was appropriate and allowed the immune system to mount a good response.

This response tends to occur more often in people who have been medicated in order to stop the expression of their symptoms, but are still able to mount an adequate immune response.

Rx: Either wait and give gentle supportive measures, or treat again to “push” the illness through more quickly.

In part the response also depends where on this curve you first treat the patient. If it is at the bottom it is more work (takes a more appropriate treatment) to “push” the patient over the top of the curve. If it is already at the top and ready for the downswing it takes much less effort.

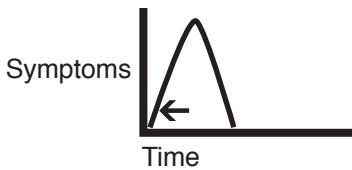


Fig. 7 Treatment when low on the curve.

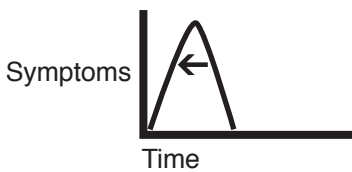


Fig. 8 Treatment when high on the curve

A truly healthy patient has a diminished chance of contracting an acute illness as their threshold is higher, i.e., their immune system is functioning at a higher level. When this individual is acutely ill, he should mount a good immune response and generate good symptoms.

An unhealthy body does not generate symptoms strongly when sufficiently challenged. As stated, it takes more to sufficiently challenge a healthy person than it does an unhealthy person due to a difference in their threshold.

The body’s response should be brisk and the duration of illness short. When treated, the healthy patient should respond as in Fig. 3 or Fig. 4. This is always a good prognosis as it means their immune system is quite responsive. A poorer prognosis follows with a less responsive immune system.

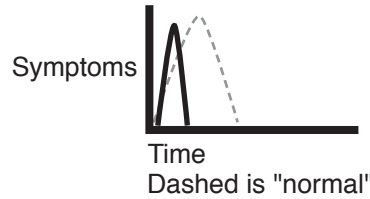


Fig. 9 Good response of the body to an acute illness.

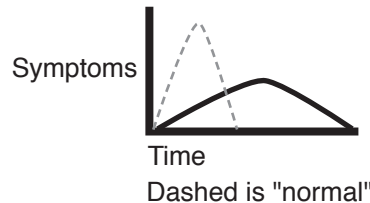


Fig. 10 Poor response of the body to an acute illness.

Dr. Still stated that we were given all parts of our body for a reason and that these parts work together. He discusses the body’s innate intelligence with the understanding that it is greater than that of any practitioner. I interpret this (as do other systems of medicine) as him saying that the body constantly tries to treat itself and, in doing so, expresses its symptoms in the most healthy way possible given any set of circumstances. If we arbitrarily interfere, we can decrease this immune response. Fortunately, osteopathy gives us a way to enhance the body’s response by supporting this innate intelligence with appropriate care.