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Osteopathy – what can it do for you?

Osteopathy is a form of manual medicine with a distinct underlying philosophy. In other words osteopathy is near impossible to explain in short words without shortchanging the profession.

Osteopathy is defined as a form of drug-free, non-invasive manual medicine that focuses on total body health by treating the musculoskeletal system.

In legal terms:

- Osteopaths are registered health care practitioners.
- In NZ Osteopaths are regulated by the Osteopathic Council of NZ (OCNZ) and our practice is governed under the Health Practitioner Competency Act 2004.
- Registration is only granted to practitioners who obtain proper tertiary qualifications (5 years full time study) and meet the stringent continuing education requirements of the OCNZ. It is illegal to use the term Osteopath in NZ without being registered.
- All registered osteopaths are ACC accredited, and private health care insurers cover some of the treatment costs. You do not need a referral from a doctor to see an osteopath.

Some examples of the wide range of problems that we treat (just the tip of the iceberg):

- Headaches and migraines
- Neck, whiplash, shoulder, back and pelvic pain
- Arm and hip/leg pain
- Post-injury treatment i.e. sports injuries, road traffic accidents, sprains, strains and fractures
- Chronic pain (arthritis, irritable bowel and so on)
- Pain associated with pregnancy
- Unsettled babies, feeding difficulties, sleeping problems, digestive problems and developmental issues in children

- As osteopaths we endeavor to discover what is preventing the body from its natural, healthy response to stimuli and then to remove that restriction. We believe that the body can heal itself and we work to straighten out anything that prevents the body from doing exactly that.

For example if someone presents with a painful knee, we will look at the whole person and maybe find that the knee itself is not the problem but the hip is. This can change the biomechanics of the leg in a way that overuses the knee, leading to pain. Hence we will start treating the hip and not the symptomatic knee. However, our work does not stop with the muscles and soft tissues. Our philosophy can also be applied to the internal organs, the blood vessels and the nerves.

Another distinguishing point is that we work from a point of health as opposed to a point of disease. Our founding father Andrew Taylor Still is quoted saying that "to find health is the objective of the doctor because anyone can find disease". Our focus as health care professionals is to find that health and expand it as opposed to find a diseased part and treat it or remove it. We aim to optimize what is there within the capabilities of the individual patient. This means that osteopathy can do something for everyone. Every patient is a new journey and we always start from scratch with everyone. Then we let the patient's body dictate where the journey takes us. This approach is what distinguishes us most from other professions.

Being defeated is a temporary condition.

Giving up is what makes it permanent.

Pia Wittwer MOst (Hons) is a registered Osteopath working in West Auckland. She studied at Unitec and finished her Master of Osteopathy in 2008. Previously she has gained a Master of Science in Molecular Biology in Switzerland but was not fully satisfied with this career. As a mother of three she has a lot of experience with pregnancy, unsettled babies, children's development and the stresses of being a working mum. High quality health care and prevention are very important to her and she strives to give that to all of her patients.

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