

The whole man: The whole musculoskeletal system

The totality of man is one of the basic tenets in the philosophy of osteopathic medicine. A human being's body, mind, and spirit must be considered as a single unit.

Rarely has anyone challenged such an approach. In fact, this belief is not uniquely promoted by the osteopathic profession; it has been taught at various times throughout medical history, from the time of Hippocrates to the present. But in the marketplace of medicine, philosophy seems to be pushed aside for what is frequently referred to as practicality. Dr. Andrew Taylor Still was a medical philosopher. And even in his day there were those involved in old-school medicine who subscribed to various points in his concept, particularly the treatment of the whole man. However, the thought that medicine needed, along with its science, a philosophy, was agreeable enough, but it was rarely applied clinically.

Today, the word "holistic" is a banner cry for many segments of medicine, both good and bad. However, in the osteopathic profession the wholeness concept is too infrequently applied to the clinical practice that activates it.

Physicians still treat stomachs as if no other body parts were related, hearts as if they were contained in isolation chambers, and brains as if they were some far-away and mysterious substance, rarely considered in depth, except by ethereal dreamers.

The osteopathic profession has recognized the importance of the musculoskeletal system by maintaining that it should be carefully diagnosed, studied, and treated in any consideration of the "whole" man and his problems. Yet, with all of our well-intentioned philosophies, all too frequently we do not apply the holistic concept even to the study of one system of the body, namely, the musculoskeletal system. Low backs get examined and treated, and often these examinations and treatments end at the thoracolumbar junction. And, if a patient is suffering from a strain from a whiplash-type of injury, the cervical joints and muscles are rubbed, pulled, stretched, and mobilized, with lit-

tle attention paid to the musculoskeletal problems that might be secondary to the neck injuries.

The reform movement begun by Still is as applicable today as it was in his time, even though the general practice of medicine in 1982 is a far cry from Still's or Hippocrates' vision.

Euphemisms such as "holistic medicine"; the unity of the body; and the interrelationship of mind, body, and spirit mean nothing if they are not religiously applied to the maintenance of health and the treatment of our patients' diseases.

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Diagnosis: "I don't know"

Perhaps one of the most difficult things for a doctor to tell a patient, when asked for a diagnosis, is to say "I don't know." All too often we physicians concoct some less-than-rational answer to appear all-knowing. We sell ourselves on the idea that we are right, and then we pontifically pronounce our clinical judgments. Perhaps it's our egos trying to outtalk our inferiority complexes.

The response, "I don't know," can be negative or positive, depending on how the physician handles it. One patient's response to the "I don't know" diagnosis was, "Thank God! The last three doctors *knew* what was wrong with me and I'm still sick." Unfortunately, there are a lot of "I don't knows" in modern medicine. We know so much more than we did a decade ago, but sometimes this newly acquired information overcomes us. It would be interesting to return 100 years from today and learn how many of the things that we now believe to be true will have been proven false.

Physicians should have positive attitudes toward their patients and their problems. It is all right to admit that there are some things that we don't know. This admission only becomes negative when we do nothing. It is justifiable to tell a patient that you are unsure about a diagnosis, as long as you promise to do everything in your power to find an answer.

Medical discoveries occur only when a lack of knowledge is admitted. In the beginning, Fleming did not understand why a mold that flew in the