

Testing osteopathic medical concepts in a real-life setting

The September 1991 issue of the *JAOA* featured the article "Nociceptive reflexes and the somatic dysfunction: A model," by Richard Van Buskirk, DO (*JAOA* 1991;91:792-809). That article presented a substantial theory of somatic dysfunction and its physiologic substrates. That same issue of the *JAOA* featured an editorial calling for more theory building and for the testing of osteopathic medical tenets with scientific investigations, both basic and clinical.

Good, scientifically valid and well-designed studies are, perhaps, one of the most difficult things a practicing physician can undertake in the office setting. In most cases, the practitioner is not trained for such an endeavor. Furthermore, he or she has limited time and resources for the undertaking of such research, and the potential researcher may find daunting the record keeping and detail necessary for such a study. This type of undertaking, however, is the ultimate testing ground for the ideas and theories of the profession.

The basic scientist can present mechanisms that may underlie the clinical phenomena observed in the office setting. Our educational institutions can support complex studies, requiring major investments of resources and manpower.

Furthermore, we can borrow data from other professions to explain those observations and clinical successes of the osteopathic medical profession. However, one of the best ways to show the efficacy of osteopathic medicine is to study the phenomena in its natural setting, the office practice.

Viola M. Frymann, DO, and her colleagues, Richard E. Carney, PhD, and Peter Springall, PhD, did just that. Beginning on page 729 in this issue, these researchers present the re-

sults of a very energetic undertaking conducted at the Osteopathic Center for Children in La Jolla, Calif. They designed and carried out a prospective study examining the effects of osteopathic medical care on children with neurologic development problems. This study, conducted during a 3-year period, represents a massive, concerted effort to test the osteopathic medical profession's claims that it offers treatment and care for a broad range of human problems, not just back problems.

The researchers evaluated 186 children, aged 18 months to 12 years, as they underwent osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT) for neurologic, medical, or structural disorders. The data show that OMT had significant positive effects on the levels of neurologic development in children with neurologic deficits. These beneficial effects continued long after treatment stopped.

Immense effort went into the design, execution, analysis, and prepublication preparation of this study. It should be a landmark event for the osteopathic medical profession because it shows that such studies are feasible; they can be accomplished. Of course, the fact that OMT seems to have "worked" just as many of us in the osteopathic medical profession would have predicted makes this a landmark study. A starting point that should not be taken lightly, this study should pave the way for more such studies in the office setting.

It is the office setting, after all, that will serve as the ultimate testing ground for osteopathic medical philosophies, thereby completing the circle from clinical observation to final clinical test.

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