

Research lacking in osteopathic medical profession

The osteopathic medical profession is not known for either the quantity or the quality of research it produces. Although excellent examples of research within our profession do exist, they are, unfortunately, not plentiful. To say that each of our medical schools or academic health centers is engaged in active research is a misleading statement. Why does a medical profession that has been in existence for more than 100 years not conduct more research? A number of different responses have been offered, but those most often heard include:

- The profession has an insufficient number of research role models.
- The profession is more concerned with producing practitioners than researchers.
- Faculty spend most of their time teaching and, therefore, have little time for research.

Regardless of the reasons, the bigger issue is that the osteopathic medical profession has an obligation to society to increase both the quantity and quality of research. As long as osteopathic physicians care for patients, the profession is obligated to create new knowledge, which is the fundamental reason for conducting research.

Osteopathic medical research should be pursued broadly and include basic sciences, as well as clinical and medical education. Although many facets of basic sciences are in need of investigation, the most important area should be finding an explanation for the basic mechanisms underlying osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT). Although OMT research traverses both the basic sciences and clinical arenas, it seems that at least in one disorder—low back pain—the clinical efficacy has been fairly well established. The research question to explore,

then, is *why* OMT is effective in low back pain.

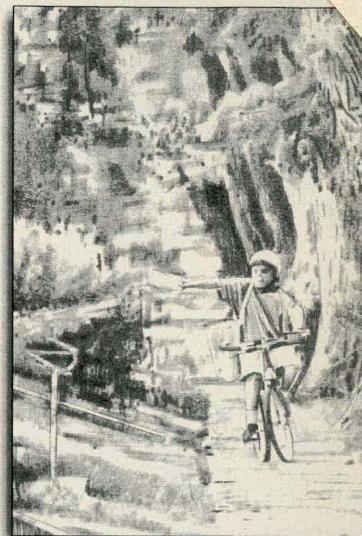
Clinical research can also look to OMT once again as a fertile area for exploration of low back pain. Can it be demonstrated via clinical research that OMT is effective in treating other musculoskeletal disorders? Is it effective in nonmusculoskeletal problems? Although some research has been done in these areas, large multicenter studies are lacking.

Much research is also needed in the area of medical education. One of the prime topics is teaching, learning, and evaluating progress in the ambulatory care environment. Very little is known regarding medical education conducted in ambulatory care sites.

These topics represent just a few of the numerous research possibilities that exist for the osteopathic medical profession to explore. We are obligated as health professionals to conduct such research and to continually build the spirit of inquiry within the profession. The next question to ask, then, is will we fulfill this obligation?♦

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