

## History of Osteopathic Medicine: Still Relevant?

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“The more you know about the past,  
the better prepared you are for the future.”  
—Attributed to Theodore Roosevelt

**T**he history of osteopathic medicine is one of innovation, inspiration, and challenge over the past century. Despite numerous obstacles, osteopathic philosophy has guided the profession to its present day. We owe much of that to the founder of the osteopathic medical profession and its first school, Andrew Taylor Still, MD, DO.

At the time of Still's death in December 1917, osteopaths were already collectively shaping the future of the profession—fighting for recognition of their training while navigating and undertaking massive changes to the curricular standards at osteopathic schools<sup>1</sup> in the shadow of Flexner's report on the state of medical education.<sup>2</sup> One hundred years later, the science, philosophy, and practice of osteopathic medicine has greatly expanded. Our profession has grown to more than 100,000 osteopathic physicians (ie, DOs), with nearly 1 in 4 medical students currently enrolled in an osteopathic medical school.<sup>3</sup> Osteopathic physicians have gained full practice rights in the United States, have climbed to leadership roles in government and academic medicine, and have remained true to our roots as physicians for the whole patient. Our growth has been focused at eliminating disparities in primary health care. As we grow, we continue to face challenges in an evolving medical education landscape with the implementation of a single accreditation system for graduate medical education.<sup>4</sup> Our history reminds us that change presents opportunity—this time, the chance to formally embed osteopathic philosophy into the entire medical education system.

Today, information is at our fingertips. This accessibility should empower us to better understand our history and philosophy, the driving principles that govern our practice. At *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association (JAOA)*, we have chosen to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Still's death by highlighting through historical vignettes that many

of the principles he espoused are “Still” relevant. We challenge our readers to engage in the history of our profession to understand its importance to who we are as DOs, to stimulate future DOs to learn more, and to better prepare DOs for the challenges ahead. We hope that our new section, “Still Relevant?” brings to light interesting historical vignettes and quotations from Still and other prominent figures in our history, with brief discussions of how the given topic is relevant to the current and future practice of medicine.

Our first “Still Relevant?” article in this issue of the *JAOA*<sup>5</sup> focuses on the role Still played in opening the doors to train female physicians at a time when few medical schools were open to women. This perspective is all the more interesting knowing that 40% of DOs in active practice—and 56% of DOs in active practice for less than 10 years—are women.<sup>3</sup>

As the osteopathic medical profession navigates another era of health care challenges, we believe the life and words of Still and other historical osteopathic figures embody the guiding principles that will continue to define us as a unique profession, now and in the future. Yes, our history is still relevant. (doi:10.7556/jaoa.2017.027)

### References

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