



A CLIENT'S INTRODUCTION TO CRANIOSACRAL WORK

This pamphlet is designed to help inform those who want to know more about craniosacral work. Please contact Milne Institute Inc. for the name and address of the certified practitioner nearest you.

WHAT IS CRANIOSACRAL WORK?

Craniosacral work is a holistic healing practice that uses extremely light finger pressure to optimize a movement pattern within the body that is known as the "cranial wave." Craniosacral work differs from most other modalities by its lightness of touch, and the long, attentive duration of each contact. It believes that focus and gentleness are the foundations of healing.

Craniosacral work is one of the most respectful of all bodywork techniques. While craniosacral work focuses on helping the cranial wave flow freely through the head, spine and pelvis, it is not limited to those areas, and may be used to work with painful or restricted conditions anywhere in the body. In fact, many practitioners find that craniosacral work helps the client access their own clarity and insight, and hence it is used not only to relieve pain, but also to help empower the client to deal successfully with many different life situations. Some therapists use it to facilitate sensitive psychic states such as are used in past-life regression therapy.

WHAT IS THE "CRANIAL WAVE?"

When we breathe, the movement of our body is obvious. Each time our heart beats, we can feel the movement of blood along the superficial arteries. But the cranial wave is so subtle that it takes trained hands to feel it, and we usually cannot feel our own wave at all. A sheet of writing paper is 100 microns thick; the average movement of a cranial bone (our heads are composed of 22 bones) is 40 microns. The normal frequency of the cranial wave cycle is from 8 to 14 per minute. The quality and frequency of the wave as it passes through (or is unable to pass through) different bones and tissues in the body is assessed by the craniosacral practitioner, who "listens" to it in order to gauge the need for treatment. (Practitioners also listen to it to sense the effectiveness of their work.)

Different conditions, such as whiplash injury, trauma to the head, or migraine headache produce different qualities in the cranial wave. The trained practitioner can recognize these qualities. The frequency of the wave can also be dramatically affected by illness—for instance, in coma it slows to 2 cycles per minute. And in meditative states, it may calm down to 3 or 4 cycles per minute, which unlike coma is a time of great inner nurturing: it is a return to the source.

The cranial wave is known to physiologists as the "Traube-Hering Wave, or "Third Order Wave." Because craniosacral work deals directly with the energy field, it is primarily what healers call "energy work," rather than structural work. In this sense it has more in common with acupuncture and shiatsu, than it does with structural techniques such as Rolfing.

WHERE DOES THE CRANIAL WAVE COME FROM?

The body is kept alive by the presence of an energy field, which is known as the “bio-electric field” in physiology, and as the “spirit” in religious traditions. In China the energy that makes up this field is called “chi,” in India “prana.” The Bible refers to it as “the breath of life.” And it is a kind of breath—it is not static, but rather fluctuates, somewhat similar to the way that household electricity alternates. However, unlike household electricity, the cranial wave fluctuates very slowly, just 8-14 times per minute. This fluctuating field of energy is not controlled by the body’s nervous system, but is independent of it, and, in an evolutionary sense, much older than it. It comes from the ocean, from the tides of the sea. Without this field we die; when the field is weakened, we feel drained. And when we are out of harmony with our own inner tides, we do not feel well, and there is no harmony in life. We feel “all out of sorts.”

WHY IS CRANIAL WORK EFFECTIVE?

In simple terms, if the cranial bones are not in the “right place,” then the brain and central nervous system cannot be in the “right place.” The hormonal system cannot perform optimally. Even though the cranial bones move only half the thickness of a sheet of writing paper, the human head is so delicate and so suffused with vital nerve pathways, that even slight deformations of a bone’s movement or position can produce physical or psychological symptoms, and often both. When the cranial wave is distorted it also consumes or diverts a disproportionate amount of “chi,” or energy, lowers the strength of the immune system, and increases the likelihood of chronic states like depression becoming intractable. When the cranial wave is optimized, we feel “all of a whole,” we feel wonderful.

The optimum fluctuation of our energy field optimizes the functioning of our nervous system, and has a profound influence on our immune and hormonal systems. That is why some people whose conditions seem to be quite unrelated to the craniocervical system do feel much better after receiving the work. Some dentists use it to make sure orthodontics are correctly fitted, and as part of their work with jaw joint or temporomandibular dysfunction (TMD). Dentists find that a cap or filling that is even 3 microns too prominent (the thickness of fine dental carbon-paper) can cause jaw, neck and head pain—occasionally even knee dysfunction. When the prominence is removed, the patient often feels immediate and dramatic relief. Craniocervical work is the only modality that specifically works with impacted sutures that can result from trauma to the head, releasing them through skilled and patient attention.

WHERE DID CRANIAL WORK ORIGINATE?

It is probably as old as humanity: as old as the laying on of hands, as old as the urge to rub a sore spot. We rub, in part, to get the cranial wave moving again. The earliest written reference to the “movement of the spinal nerves” and its importance in life, clarity and “bringing quiet to the heart,” is found in the I-Ching, the Chinese Book of Changes, which is 4,000 years old. The ancient Chinese called craniocervical work “the art of listening.” Touching upon how subtle movement is at the core of our being, 700 years ago the Persian mystic Rumi noted that

“Your deepest presence is in every small folding and unfolding,
the two as perfectly balanced and coordinated as birds’ wings”

In the Middle Ages, bonesetters sensed the fine movements of the body to assist resetting fractures and dislocations, and to treat headaches. In modern times the American osteopath and biomedical genius, William Sutherland, spent fifty years beginning in 1900, detailing the individual movements of the human cranium and pelvis. He called his work “Cranial Osteopathy,” and he made an enormous contribution to the healing arts. His contemporary, Nephi Cottam, an American chiropractor, called it “Craniology.” Graduates of these two founding disciplines have added their own refinements and renamed their work variously as “Sacro-Occipital Technique,” “Cranial Movement Therapy” or “Craniosacral Therapy.”

WHY SUCH DELICATE PRESSURES?

The head works at extremely fine tolerances—during a quiet conversation, for instance, the eardrum moves less than the diameter of a hydrogen atom, and there are 100 billion billion hydrogen atoms in one drop of water. Because the joints between adjacent cranial bones (the “sutures”) are so finely balanced and move so little, the practitioner must focus intently on the movement that he or she is “listening” to. Any rushed or hard pressure tends to distort the normal movement of the bones and also frightens the client: it feels like an earthquake. There is a similarity here to homeopathy—the minutest dose is capable of creating the greatest transformation. In the Western world we are accustomed to being impressed by size, speed, power, noise. We think that the bigger the dose, the more powerful it is. In Eastern countries, they have an older, quieter understanding. They say, “It is amazing how much how little will do.”

IS CRANIOSACRAL WORK SAFE?

Any effective modality—whether it is aspirin or surgery—has the possibility of creating harm. Only ineffective modalities, like milk-and-sugar pills, can claim never to produce side effects. While very subtle and careful, craniosacral work is nonetheless powerful, and as such occasionally produces side-effects such as headache, or neck stiffness. This almost always occurs because the client has had a pre-existing trauma to his or her head that went unrecognized and the craniosacral work “stirred it up.” Seen wisely, such events are to be welcomed, because they allow the old wound to finally heal and the energy that has been bound up there to be released. Craniosacral training is designed to equip the practitioner with the means to identify and rectify any such occurrence. The work itself is inherently safe, since no strong pressures are used; there are no sudden jolts, no medication and no incisions or anesthesia.

IS CRANIOSACRAL WORK SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN TO BE EFFECTIVE?

In the hundred years since William Sutherland first began documenting the effectiveness of cranial osteopathy, there have been more than 40 scientific papers published documenting various aspects of its effectiveness, and at least 10 authoritative textbooks published. Notable amongst the scientific papers are Viola M. Frymann’s work documenting the successful treatment of 1,250 newborn children with birth defects, Edna Lay and Stephen Blood’s work on temporomandibular joint disorders (TMD), and John Wood’s work on psychiatric disorders. Many of the osteopathic medical schools in the USA teach it. The American Dental Association has found it to be an effective adjunct to orthodontic work.

More than 20,000 craniosacral practitioners in this country have also clinically proved its effectiveness alone. They use it because it is effective. Sir James Paget (1814-1899), the British physician after whom Paget’s Disease is named, noted “That which is clinically proved needs no other evidence.”

WHO IS CRANIOSACRAL WORK SUITABLE FOR?

Craniosacral work is no panacea. There are some people with some conditions for whom it offers no help at all. But there are many conditions, particularly birth defects, muscle contraction headache, migraine, cluster headache, neck arthritis, low back pain, scoliosis, personality disturbance, dyslexia, whiplash, Bells Palsy, vertigo and temporomandibular joint dysfunction (TMD) where, in the right environment, it can be highly effective. Other conditions, such as autism and tinnitus meet with varying degrees of success. Craniosacral work can also be highly effective in helping the return of mental clarity and abundant energy after a life-crisis, and sometimes helps alleviate chronic depression. It is also sought out by those who are perfectly healthy, as a meditative and calming experience. Some people find craniosacral touch a deeply spiritual experience. And a few find it creates a fertile ground for the kind of transformative insight that paves the way for important change.

ENERGY AND SYMPTOMS

Cranial work regards the body, and its energy field, as a field of intelligence and of information, which the practitioner is well advised to listen to and respect. A flow of different, quieter energies takes over during an illness, and an inner wisdom often surfaces within the client's consciousness that leads to a breakthrough and transformation. In cranial work, symptoms are seen as intelligent responses of a dreambody that is in some way stressed beyond its particular adaptive or coping abilities; symptoms are regarded as distress transmissions that allow the listening and attentive observer to understand what really troubles the client, and what they need. In deeper healing practices, the assessment of what the client needs is not limited to physical interpretations or biochemical intervention, but includes a sensing of what the client needs to return to a full and rewarding lifestyle.

The cranial practitioner's job is to facilitate and enhance the workings of the healing response. The wise healer also understands that healing resources are also available outside the client, in the form of nurturing friendships, wise counselors, family, and within the client's social network. The adept practitioner finds ways to avail the client of many of these different forms of healing. It is not the practitioner's job to dictate to the cranial system. The practitioner learns to put his or her hands on the client, and wait for the client's craniosacral system and its energy field to tell them what to do. In this sense, cranial work is truly a client-centered therapy.

IS CRANIOSACRAL WORK USED IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD?

Yes, it is used extensively in England, France, Germany and Switzerland, as well as in Israel, India and Australia.

IS CRANIOSACRAL A LICENSED PROFESSION IN THE UNITED STATES?

A minority of osteopaths and chiropractors use cranial work as their sole therapeutic modality, but there is no license for cranial osteopathy, craniology or craniosacral work. In the late 1970s a few osteopaths and chiropractors began to teach craniosacral work to students from other disciplines, such as acupuncturists, dentists, licensed massage practitioners, naturopaths, physical therapists and Rolfers. These health professionals use craniosacral work as part or all of their therapeutic process, and practice it within the appropriate scope of their licensure.

HOW ARE CRANIOSACRAL PRACTITIONERS TRAINED?

Many craniosacral practitioners receive their training as part of a medical or holistic discipline, such as Osteopathy, Chiropractic or Rolfing, or take a postgraduate course after physical therapy, nursing or massage licensure. Practitioners certified by Milne Institute Inc. complete a 2-year training that covers anatomy, physiology, symptomatology, and psychology, in addition to meditation practice and training in sensitivity, perception and intuition.

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