

UNITY OF THE BODY

In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the inter-related structure of reality.¹²

REV. DR MARTIN LUTHER KING JR

Everything is connected

An important tenet of osteopathic practice is that the body functions as a totality in both health and disease. The different parts of the body often get separated for the purposes of study or examination, but in reality they are part of an interdependent system. When something is put under the microscope, it's easy to lose sight of the whole picture. In this way, it has become common practice in modern Western medicine to fragment the different aspects of a human

being into separate areas. All parts of the body are seen to require the specialized attention of an expert in that particular organ or system (the cardiologist, gastroenterologist, urologist, etc.). Then, any psychological difficulties have to be dealt with by yet another specialist. Some patients end up seeing three or four specialists, with each one treating something different.

An organization

In actual fact, each part is directly connected to the whole and functions in relationship to all other parts. In this way, the body operates like a large organization such as a hotel.¹³ In a hotel every employee is important, to ensure that everything runs smoothly and efficiently. The porters, managers, cleaners, cooks and receptionists are all necessary to keep things running. If any one job is not carried out, very soon it affects the functioning of the whole organization. Likewise in the body: if any part is disturbed, it can affect the functioning of the whole. As the physiologist Dr Irwin Korr observes, "There is no such thing as a sick organ; there is only a sick man. Treating the part alone is not treating the man, while treating the man is to treat the part too."¹⁴

Sophie's case

Sophie came for craniosacral treatment with a neck pain which had been getting steadily worse over the previous month, despite receiving physiotherapy treatment. She was an active and fit dancer in her mid-thirties, who was performing nightly in a West End London musical. However, her neck problem was starting to interfere with her ability to make any kind of physical exertion. This was making her feel irritable and frustrated with the limitations that she was experiencing. She reported that about six weeks previously she had twisted her ankle while rehearsing. As this was nothing very unusual, she hadn't paid it too much attention. However, she was still feeling some restriction in her foot, even though the initial swelling of her ankle had gone down.

On examination, I came to the conclusion that the ankle injury was probably still affecting the balance of movement in her whole body. Her pelvis was slightly twisted and, in turn, some rotation and stiffness had developed in her lumbar spine. This seemed to be creating a compensatory pattern in her neck.

During her treatment, we started working with the remaining inertia in her foot. From there it was possible to track the problems manifesting higher up in her body and encourage the

expression of primary respiratory motion at each site of restriction. Within two treatments there was a great improvement in all her symptoms.

Sophie's case illustrates a simple point: if we do not look at the whole picture, we will likely miss the conditions which cause and maintain our symptoms. A Green Party slogan sums up this principle: 'Think globally, act locally.'

The whole person

Moreover, this law of unity applies to the whole person, not just our muscles and bones. The body is a part of a continuum – mind, body and spirit, and intelligently reflects the whole. Clearly, we are complex beings, with all our individual traits and unique experiences. Nevertheless, the body registers all of these experiences, thoughts and feelings, as well as more physical ones. Responses are accordingly created in the body's structure and functioning. For example, heart rate and breathing may change, muscles may contract or relax, or temperature changes may occur according to our situation. The patterning of the body becomes a distinctive expression of the totality of the individual. We probably have all become aware of this process at some point. How does your body reflect your current situation? What is it saying to you?

Finding wholeness

The primary respiratory system reflects the totality of the individual at the most fundamental level of physiological functioning. A clear and balanced expression of primary respiratory motion signifies the manifestation of health and integration involving the whole person. Where there is some fragmentation of our experience, this is reflected as a focal point of inertia. These are places where the Breath of Life is unable to find expression in the tissues. The essential purpose of craniosacral treatment is to help restore primary respiratory motion in areas of the body which have become fragmented in their connection to the whole.

As primary respiratory motion is restored, and fragmented parts of ourselves re-enter the flow of life, we become whole again. This is healing in its truest sense, for the word 'health' comes from the same Latin root as the word 'whole'.

Balanced alignment

Craniosacral treatment seeks the best possible conditions for the expression of primary respiratory motion. This is done by encouraging greater balance in the structure and function of the whole person. When this optimal alignment is found, it allows for fragmented areas to reconnect with their source of health. In this way, discordant parts of ourselves are brought back into focus. When thinking about this, I'm sometimes reminded of some old movies in which the dialogue never quite matches up to the movement on the actor's lips – the soundtrack is somehow out of synchronization with the pictures. If ever there's a time in the film when these two come back into alignment, there's always a feeling of great satisfaction!¹⁵

INNER SOURCE OF HEALING

It is the primary role of the physician, whether the African witch doctor or the modern doctor, to entertain the patient while secretly waiting for nature to heal the disease.

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

Inner physician

A further principle of practice is that the body is a self-healing and self-regulating system. Essentially, all the capabilities and resources that we need for health and balance can be found within the body itself. While external remedies may *support* the emergence of health, they do not *create* it. Health cannot be administered from the outside.

The tendency of the body to repair itself and find balance is natural and innate; not something which has to be learned. This great intelligence is demonstrated in all the body's activities. For example, if we cut a finger, fluid congregates in the area, causing inflammation. This helps to isolate the region, preventing the spread of any infection. White blood cells, which are contained in the inflammatory fluid, automatically start to remove any toxins which enter. Clotting factors in the blood help to form a scab, and tissue repair follows. Without this extraordinary expertise, the body could not repair even the simplest cut. Dr Still referred to this intelligence as an 'inner physician' which is always there to encourage optimum health for the individual.¹⁶