

**BLOG: Valuable History Lesson from that Other Profession
(Osteopathic Integration into Medicine)**

An editorial in the November 4, 1999 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine relayed an interesting story on the assimilation of osteopathy into the field of medicine. The article entitled, "The Paradox of Osteopathy", noted the common characteristics of osteopathy and chiropractic during their developmental stages in the late 1800's and early part of the 20th century. The article noted that both systems were seen by mid-westerners during the earlier years as preferable forms of treatment to the laboratory-based medicine which was established firmly on the eastern seaboard and gradually spreading. The article describes how chiropractic and osteopathy were initially parts of a pluralistic medical system; but that they gradually took different paths over the course of the 20th century. Chiropractors generally remain focused on spinal manipulation; while osteopaths began "working hard to employ the entire therapeutic armamentarium of the modern physician" and gradually moved closer to allopathic medicine.

An interesting tale from the article describes the assimilation of osteopathy in the early 1960's when the California Medical Association and the California Osteopathic Association merged. Many refer to that merger as "the osteopathic profession's darkest hour". By attending a short seminar and paying \$65.00, a D.O. could obtain an M.D. degree. Eighty-six percent (86%) of the D.O.'s in California chose to become M.D.'s. The College of Osteopathic Physicians and Surgeons became the University of California College of Medicine.

The article states:

"Osteopathy was originally created as a radical alternative to what was seen as a failing medical system. Its success at moving into the mainstream may have come at a cost – the loss of identity. Most people – including physicians – know very little about the field. Many people – even osteopaths – question what osteopathy has to offer that is distinctive."

This editorial includes with a description of osteopathy at the close of the 20th century. The article concludes:

“At its birth, osteopathy was a radical concept, rejecting much of what allopathic medicine claimed was new and useful. Today, osteopathic medicine has moved closer to the mainstream – close enough that in general it is no longer considered alternative medicine. The long-term survival of osteopathic medicine will depend on its ability to define itself as distinct from and yet still equivalent to allopathic medicine. That argument may best be articulated not in theoretical terms, but by demonstrating treatment outcomes. The paradox is this: If osteopathy has become the functional equivalent of allopathy, what is the justification for its continued existence? And if there is value in theory that is uniquely osteopathic – that is, based on osteopathic manipulation or other techniques – why should its use be limited to osteopaths?”

This “history lesson” of osteopathy certainly raises critical, long-term questions. Chiropractors should never forget this history lesson. (Copies of this editorial by Joel D. Howell, M.D., Ph.D. are available upon request.)