

Massage & Chiropractic Relationships

In my 31 years of chiropractic practice I've worked alongside massage therapists for more than half of that time. I'm sure many of you reading this have observed that the benefit for the patient receiving the two healing arts together is far greater than the patient would experience having them applied separately.

As readers of this newsletter probably know, chiropractic is a drugless healing art that seeks not to treat any specific disease but to maximize health through the optimization of neurological function by locating and correcting interferences to spinal function.

What may be news to readers of this article is how this optimization occurs and why massage and chiropractic create such a viable healing modality. To pose this as a mechanical question, what is it that happens when we work to release the spine and allow it to function as optimally as possible?

For the many years chiropractors and massage therapists have worked together on patients we've assumed that the results we attained were due to what might be described as linear processes. For example, Mrs. Jones comes to our clinic complaining of low back pain, dysmenorrhea and fatigue. We find she has vertebral misalignments (subluxations), myofascial dysfunction and muscle spasm. She receives a series of adjustments and massages and, if we're lucky, we get her to drink more water, stop quaffing large quantities of sweet tea and cut back on the wheat and processed oils. Lo and behold a few weeks later she reports that her back feels better and that her cycles no longer leave her incapacitated and that she can function normally without needing 10 - 12 hours of sleep each night. She thinks we've performed a miracle but we know that this is just the body functioning normally.

Okay, so what's the news? The news is that our prior concepts of applying a specific force to a vertebra and relieving nerve pressure or using therapeutic massage on the spine to restore normal muscular tone and balance and thereby improving the patient's function are not the linear concepts we have been taught in years past. And that is fantastic news.

As many of you are probably aware chiropractors for decades have told their patients that the results we get are due to moving a vertebra that is "pinching" a nerve and thereby diminishing that nerve's ability to

communicate with the body parts that it supplies. We have often referred to this as the garden hose theory - if a garden hose has a rock pressing on it the capacity of the hose to allow water to pass through it will be compromised and the plants will suffer due to the diminished supply of water. This theory served us well over the years and was easy to explain. However it left questions unanswered when we saw the results of cranio-sacral therapy or when we had patients with unremarkable MRIs or x-rays who had horrible dysfunction while patients whose films looked like they came from a radiologic pathology textbook had mild symptoms.

What we are learning is that the spine is a not just a collection of interconnected bone and cartilage and muscle that houses the CNS. It is a *neurological organ* that not only allows the brain to communicate with the body but provides the brain with a constant flow of information that is not limited to movement and position but actually enhances the function of the prefrontal cortex as well as other areas of the cerebrum and the cerebellum. This has profound implications for the proper balance of sympathetic and parasympathetic function. Which of course then has profound implications for the proper balance of cortisol and insulin. Which then has profound implications for the reduction of chronic inflammation and as we have learned inflammation is associated with all major disease processes.

This is what allows for the visceral changes that we see. This is why we KNOW that our patients and clients are better off with wellness care than palliative care. This is why our patients and clients tell us that they never informed us of their digestive dysfunction but ever since receiving care they no longer have heart burn or reflux. This is why our patients and clients have changes, often profound changes, in mental attitude, alertness and cognitive function when they undergo care that lasts for more than a few sessions.

So when we correct proprioceptive and mechano-receptive dysfunction through adjustment and massage we are not simply relieving lower back pain or muscle spasm or headaches, we are enhancing brain function and I think that's a lot more fun.

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