

Making Sense of Homeopathy, Iridology, Osteopathy & Chiropractic

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Introduction

In this article, we're going to explore 4 alternative approaches to medical care: Homeopathy, Iridology, Osteopathy, and Chiropractic. My goal is that by the end of this short lecture, you'll know a bit about each topic, what makes each of them a valid holistic health practice, and any similarities or differences between them.

Homeopathy

It's very common for people who are quite new to alternative/holistic health to think that that term homeopathy is synonymous with natural or holistic medicine. I've encountered quite a few people who refer to "homeopathy" as though it's just another way of saying "natural health," and when I teach them difference, they seem slightly surprised. (Our students are certainly not immune to this case of mistaken identity, especially as they first begin their studies, so it's good to know what to tell them and how to spark their education in this direction.) In truth, while homeopathy is certainly among the most natural of remedies, it is quite unique among holistic modalities.

Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, a German physician, founded the theory of homeopathy more than 200 years ago. He concluded, after extensive research and personal study, that when any substance – plant, animal or mineral – is taken excessively, the body responds with certain symptoms. Even more significant was Hahnemann's discovery that when these substances are taken in a highly diluted form, they relieve the same symptoms that they induce at high doses. This basic thought has gone down in the history of homeopathy as *Similia similibus curentur*, which means "Like cures like." This is often referred to as The Law of Similars.

Hahnemann developed symptom profiles for hundreds of substances by testing his theory on himself and his family members. Since their origination, these profiles have been added to, and the effectiveness of new preparations continues to be tested. There are over 3,000 known remedies today. While allopathic medicine remains highly skeptical of homeopathy, people continue to receive training and certification as homeopathic practitioners and doctors today. Some of these courses are conducted via distance learning; this is an option that some GCNM graduates may be interested in.

A basic premise in homeopathy is that remedies work because they trigger the body's own healing abilities. Stresses to a person's constitution (which include physical, mental and emotional states) are what cause disease which are then manifest through symptoms. In homeopathy, understanding a person's symptoms is key to identifying the proper remedy for a health concern. In fact, my research of the subject turned up something of a "Symptom Hierarchy" that homeopaths use. In short form, it goes like this:

- Mental symptoms are more heavily weighted than
- Symptoms generally associated with illness (such as headaches, colds, etc.), which are more heavily weighted than
- Symptoms connected with the desire for, or aversion to certain foods or environmental factors, which are weighted more heavily than
- Symptoms associated with sleeping habits or what they call "paradoxical symptoms" (such as uncontrollable laughter during a period of mourning), which are weighted heavier than
- Symptoms connected with compulsive behavior and sexuality, which are weighted heavier than
- Local, externally visible signs of disease, such as inflammation.

So, according to this hierarchy, physical symptoms are not of prime consideration, as they are in allopathic care. While they're certainly considered, homeopaths look to all the other holistic components at play.

One of the interesting things about homeopathic remedies is that, through the serial dilution of the substance being used to create the remedy, the finished product may actually not have even a single molecule of the original substance in it. Where allopathic medicine claims this to be something like a placebo, homeopaths believe that the manner of dilution (also called potentisation) releases the energetic or spiritual essence of the original substance so that its energy imprint is strongly present in the finished remedy.

Even more surprising, was that Hahnemann discovered that, in general, the more diluted the substance, the more powerful the remedy became.

There are a few basic terms that you should know when speaking with others about homeopathy. We've already covered the "Law of Similars" (which is that "like cures like"). Another is "vital force," which is what Hahnemann called the body's spirit or its essence. "Vital force" is also used to speak about the body's self-regulating mechanism; its natural tendency toward homeostasis. Some other terms to know include:

- *Mother substance* – the raw material for a homeopathic preparation (if solid)
- *Mother tincture* – the raw material for a homeopathic preparation (if liquid)
- *Potentisation* – a special method of successively diluting a solution so that less and less of the original, mother substance actually remains

- *Succussion* – a step in potentisation during which the solution is shaken with a great deal of force; Hahnemann was known to hold the solution in one fist and strike his other hand with it as hard as he could to achieve this step.
- *Decimal potencies* – the “X” potencies (such as “10X”); these work on a base of 10 so that to prepare a 1X potency remedy 1 part of the mother substance is succussed with 9 parts of a diluent; a 10X remedy means it has been diluted 10 times in that proportion
- *Centesimal potencies* – the “C” potencies (such as “30C”); these work on a base of 100 such that 1 part of the mother substance is succussed with 99 parts of the diluent; a 6C potency means the remedy has been diluted in this manner 6 times.

Homeopathy considers not only the disease but the person as a whole. A homeopath will first take a homeopathic history to get a comprehensive picture of the client’s living situation, behavior, genetics, past diseases and events and even temperament. All these elements, along with current symptoms, are taken into consideration for prescribing a treatment plan.

Some examples of homeopathic remedies include the following:

Apis – Apis is prepared from the whole honeybee, though one source suggests it is produced from a bee venom, which contains histamine, the chemical that is released in the body when an allergic reaction happens, causing allergic symptoms such as inflammation. Apis is prescribed for all acute conditions with symptoms resembling those of beestings. These include acute mucous-membrane and skin inflammations accompanied by severe reddening, swelling, burning, itching and sensitivity of the inflamed area to heat. This means Apis can be a remedy not just for beestings and insect bites but also for rashes, hives, weeping or pus-filled blisters, poison ivy, carbuncles, conjunctivitis, sties and sore throats. Apis is useful for allergic reactions, since these tend to include such symptoms. Because of the diluted nature of homeopathic remedies, those allergic to beestings or poison ivy can be treated with Apis when affected, though they may also need medical attention.

Murcurius solubilis – Murcurius solubilis is a special type of mercury preparation that uses a mixture of metallic mercury and other mercury compounds, including mercury oxide. This homeopathic remedy is an anti-inflammatory and can reduce swelling of the salivary glands, lymph nodes, tonsils and liver, and inflammations in the nose and throat. In addition, this remedy has a soothing effect on the nervous system and the psyche. It also eases neuralgia and joint pain. Mercurius solubilis is often prescribed during the more acute stages of illness. Mercury is the remedy of choice for patients complaining of swollen lymph nodes and who meet the mercury-symptom profile.

Ruta – Ruta is manufactured in various forms (pellets, tablets or granules) from the rue plant. The fresh aboveground portions of the plant are collected as they begin to bloom, when they contain pungent, bitter oil. The volatile oil in the rue plant contains rutin, which helps support and strengthen the inner lining of blood vessels. The homeopathic

remedy relies on the energy of rutin; it's known to be beneficial for the healing of bruises, as well as for reducing the swelling of wrenched or torn tendons. Sports injuries, such as bruises to the bone, sprains, and pulled muscles respond well to treatment with Ruta. The remedy has been prescribed for pain and inflammation following surgery, as well as for conditions resulting from certain types of physical overexertion, such as tendonitis. Ruta is especially important in the treatment of carpal tunnel syndrome and carpal ganglions. These ailments can develop from a repetitive hand motion, such as typing. Ruta has also been effective in treating plantar warts.

Chamomilla – Chamomilla is extracted from the whole fresh chamomile plant. Also known by the abbreviation “Cham,” it is available in most health food stores. The potencies most recommended are 4X, 6X or 12X strength. Chamomilla is especially useful for treating ailments affecting women and children. The remedy's antispasmodic action is particularly effective against stomachaches, intestinal pain, gallbladder attacks, menstrual cramps, facial neuralgias, teething pain, tension headaches and insomnia. Chamomilla may be most useful when pain or other symptoms arise as a result of anger, nervous tension or emotional upset. Those most likely to benefit from it have a low pain threshold, are moody and have difficulty letting go of their emotional stress, especially at night.

Iridology

In the mid-19th century, the Hungarian physician and homeopath Ignaz von Peczely explored the relationship between the eye and the body's internal organs. He founded the diagnostic technique called *Iridology*. The story goes that, as a boy, he found an owl with a broken leg (some reports say he accidentally broke the owl's leg himself). He noticed a stripe of black in the iris of the owl. After nursing the owl's leg back to health, he noticed the stripe of black was replaced with fine, crooked white lines. Years later, as an adult and a doctor, he began to realize that his patients had similar irregularities in their irises. The differences depended on the type and stage of the illnesses they had. Over time he charted a map of the iris/body relation.

A corollary to this story is that around the same time, a 14-year-old Swedish boy, Nils Liljequist, became severely ill following a vaccination. After he began treatment with quinine and other potent drugs he noticed a change in his iris color. Years later, when he had broken some of his ribs, he again noticed a change in his iris color. In 1893 he published over 258 drawings depicting his interpretation of the iris/body relation.

Apparently, the two men's maps of the eye/body relationship were quite similar.

More recently, Dr. Bernard Jensen published his own set of iridology maps in the United States in the 1950s. These are some of the most widely used maps for Iridology, which is now gaining popularity world wide, especially in Australia, Canada, and some European and Asian Countries.

Iridology is based on the belief that every organ and area of the body is reflected by a specific place on the iris, which is the colored part of the eye surrounding the pupil. Any changes in the shape, color or structure of the iris are believed to provide clues to underlying medical disorders. Iridology also supplies information concerning a person's general health and wellbeing, genetic strengths and weaknesses, susceptibility to disease and even hidden causes of past or present symptoms. The left eye is believed to correspond with the left side of the body and the right eye with the right side of the body. In general, the higher organs (brain, thyroid) are at the top of the iris and the lower organs (kidneys) are at the bottom.

To examine the iris for diagnostic purposes, the iridologist may use a special microscope that illuminates the iris and magnifies it 6-35 times. The presence of any flecks or ray-shaped fibers indicates weaknesses in the connective tissue of the iris and suggests underlying disease(s).

Iridologists use a special index card that schematically divides both eyes into specific zones. Each zone, then, corresponds to a particular system, organ, or area of the body. The diagnostic procedure does not require eye drops or other medications and usually takes only a few minutes, although several follow-up visits may be required. Some iridologists will actually take a series of photographs over subsequent office visits so they can look for specific changes in the iris to determine whether a particular course of treatment is working.

In reading the iris to gain insight to the body and diseases there are several characteristics that are studied. These include, but are not limited to: layers, colors, rings and spots.

Layers help determine the nature of a problem, whether acute, sub-acute, chronic or degenerative. **Eye color** by itself can give information as to basic constitution. (Blue eyes indicate a tendency to develop tonsillitis, swollen glands, sinus infections, bronchitis and allergies; brown eyes indicate tendencies toward liver and bile disorders, circulatory and skin diseases, varicose veins, thromboses, etc.; Gray-green or mixed eye colors indicate tendencies toward increased mucus, active sweat glands, metabolic disorders and digestive complaints.) Beyond this, **colors** over certain areas on the iris help determine what types of changes are occurring. (*White* indicates an area of the body working hard to "maintain"; *Yellow-white* indicates an area of the body losing a battle; *Yellow* indicates poor kidney function; yellow sclera (white part of the eye) suggest gallbladder disease; *Orange* indicates problems metabolizing carbohydrates and weakness in the liver and/or pancreas. Glucose levels should be checked; *Red-brown* indicates deterioration; *Brown* indicates poor liver function and "dirty blood;" *Black* indicates dying tissue, etc.) **Rings** can indicate many things, from tense muscles to kidney stress to parasites, skin problems and stubbornness. And **spots** indicate deficiencies or a "blocking" of awareness about a particular organ or system.

As far as Iridology maps go, there are around 20 recognized maps and, apparently, they are not all alike. It is suggested that Bernard Jensen's maps are most widely utilized today. You can right-click and save a graphic file of Jensen's iridology map [here](#). Another idea is to set it as wallpaper on your computer, which blows it up to a good size.

Osteopathy

Osteopathy is a holistic approach to healing based on the premise that a misaligned musculoskeletal system is the root of most health problems. Since healthy muscles, bones and nerves are fundamental to proper blood and lymph flow, osteopaths maintain that chronic muscle tension and poor posture can restrict organ function.

Doctors of Osteopathy, called DOs are fully licensed physicians who may also practice conventional, allopathic medicine. This means that they may prescribe drugs, surgery and use typical technologies for diagnosis of disease. Unlike typical MDs, however, DOs can apply a range of techniques, including light pressure and joint and spine manipulations, to restore the body's natural mobility and equilibrium. In addition, osteopathic therapy combines extremely well with other natural modalities, such as massage, acupuncture, homeopathy and craniosacral therapy.

Osteopathic medicine was founded in the late 1800s in Kirksville, Missouri by Andrew Taylor Still, MD, who recognized that the medical practices of the day often caused more harm than good. After losing members of his immediate family to meningitis, Still focused on developing a system of medical care that would promote the body's innate ability to heal itself. He called his system of medicine "osteopathy," now also known as osteopathic medicine.

Osteopathic physicians work in partnership with their patients. They consider the impact that lifestyle and community have on the health of each individual, and they work to erase barriers to good health. Unlike their MD counterparts, DOs are trained to look at the whole person from their first days of medical school, which means they see each person as more than just a collection of body parts that may become injured or diseased. This holistic approach to patient care means that osteopathic medical students learn how to integrate the patient into the health care process as a partner. They are trained to communicate with people from diverse backgrounds, and they get the opportunity to practice these skills in the classroom with simulated patients.

Because of this whole-person approach to healing, approximately 60% of all DOs choose to practice in the primary care disciplines of family practice, general internal medicine and pediatrics. Approximately 40% go on to specialize in a wide range of practice areas. What this means is that if the medical specialty exists, you will probably find DOs there.

According to once source, while America's 52,000 DOs account for only 5% of the country's physicians, they handle approximately 10% of all primary care visits. DOs also have a strong history of serving rural and underserved areas, often providing their unique brand of compassionate, patient-centered care to some of the most economically disadvantaged members of society. And, DOs are a rapidly growing body of practitioners! About one in five medical students in the US is attending an osteopathic medical school.

In addition to studying all of the typical subjects you would expect student physicians to master, osteopathic medical students take approximately 200 additional hours of training in the art of

osteopathic manipulative medicine. This system of hands-on techniques helps alleviate pain, restores motion, supports the body's natural functions and influence the body's structure to help it function more efficiently.

One key concept osteopathic medical students learn is that *structure influences function*. Thus, if there is a problem in one part of the body's structure, function in that area, and possibly in other areas, may be affected. For example, restriction of motion in the lower ribs, lumbar spine and abdomen can cause stomach pain with symptoms that mimic irritable bowel syndrome. By using osteopathic manipulative medicine techniques, DOs can help restore motion to these areas of the body thus improving gastrointestinal function, oftentimes restoring it to normal.

Another integral tenet of osteopathic medicine is the body's innate ability to heal itself. Many of osteopathic medicine's manipulative techniques are aimed at reducing or eliminating the impediments to proper structure and function so the self-healing mechanism can assume its role in restoring the person to health.

During an examination, the osteopath will look for the causes of mechanical problems within the body. Diagnostic methods include the screening and evaluation of:

- Posture and gait: how a person holds their body while standing and sitting and during activities such as walking.
- Motion: testing evaluates all moving parts for restrictions. For example, a patient may be asked to complete various body movements such as bending, side-bending, extension or rotation for both specific and general areas of the body.
- Symmetry: to notice one-sided use of any part of the body and subsequent stress. Osteopaths also look for increased or decreased curve to the normal spinal pattern.
- The soft tissues: using inspection and palpation to look for skin changes, hardening of muscles, temperature changes, tenderness, reflex activity and excessive fluid retention.

Osteopathic treatments affect the entire body, including the circulatory, nervous, respiratory and autonomic nervous systems. In general, osteopathy is both relaxing and stimulating and can include the following techniques:

- Passive and active stretching, or the muscle-energy technique, which gently tenses and releases specific muscles. This is used to strengthen muscle groups and relieve pain associated with sports injuries.
- Soft-tissue techniques apply pressure to manipulate the muscles, similar to various massage techniques. These relax and release restrictions in the soft tissues of the body.
- Gentle holding sequences, such as craniosacral techniques, that help restore coordinated and subtle movements between the skull and the sacrum.
- A high-velocity, low-amplitude thrust technique that manipulates the joints. This is also called "articulation."

- Myofascial release, which applies traction to treat tension in the muscles and the connective tissues by releasing tension in the fascia (which is the elastic semi-fluid membrane that envelops every muscle, bone, blood vessel, nerve and organ). This improves muscle function and restores balance to the musculoskeletal system.

Chiropractic

Chiropractic medicine is a branch of the healing arts which is concerned with human health and prevention of disease through special attention to spinal biomechanics, and musculoskeletal, neurological, vascular and nutritional relationships. Chiropractic has become the second largest primary health care field in the world; an estimated 23-28 million people visit chiropractors each year in the United States to receive drugless and surgery-free health care.

It's a holistic therapy which recognizes the overall health of the patient and the body's innate ability to heal itself from physical, mental, and emotional stress and trauma. Chiropractic medicine is concerned with the relationship between the spinal column, afferent and efferent neurons (sensory and motor neurons), and the entire nervous system.

All of the body's tissues and organs are connected electrically to the spinal column, or backbone, which is protected by the twenty-four vertebrae. Chiropractic theory states that the misalignment of the spinal cord affects other portions of the body and creates pain, sometimes disease, and other musculoskeletal abnormalities. When subluxation occurs, it can result in tension in the tissues of the nervous system. This in turn can impede its functioning, which diminishes or distorts the communication between the brain and the rest of the body, and contributing to a wide variety of health issues. For example, tension in the lower back may force a person to compensate by bending forward, which can interfere with the movement of the ribs and restrict the functioning of the lungs. It may also cause the neck muscles to contract, which in many cases can lead to muscle spasms, headaches, strained vision, or balance and coordination problems.

Chiropractic medicine is an excellent alternative for those who want to avoid surgery for injuries such as loose discs in the neck, slight scoliosis, and out of place vertebrae.

According to chiropractic, pathological disease may be influenced by disturbances of the nervous system. As a holistic modality, it recognizes the various factors that can contribute to impaired health: genetic/hereditary factors, improper rest, lack of exercise, inadequate and improper nutrition, foods tainted by pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, fertilizers and preservatives, improperly cooked and/or processed foods, contaminated water, air pollution, stress, bodily trauma, emotional distress, bacteria and viruses. Almost any component of the nervous system may directly or indirectly cause reactions within any other component by means of what is known as "reflex mediation."

Though the practice of spinal manipulation and adjustment has existed in virtually every ancient civilization, the modern-day system of chiropractic therapy was founded in 1895 by

Daniel David Palmer, a grocer and mystic healer from Iowa. Apparently, he helped a janitor regain his hearing by a push on his spine. Palmer later founded the first chiropractic school. Palmer felt that the task of chiropractic was not to treat conditions but to remove nerve interference caused by subluxations so that the body's inherent capacity to heal itself would be able to take over and restore health and homeostasis. His approach appealed to those who demanded a more natural approach to healing.

A chiropractor will first take a complete medical history. The physical exam involves an analysis of posture, including the degree of right-left symmetry; joint and spine mobility; muscle tension and reactivity; gait; agility; and discrepancies in leg length. The chiropractor will also feel for painful or tender areas. X-rays are not uncommon and sometimes tests such as nerve-conduction tests are done, as well. Treatment, which draws on 100 or more specific manual maneuvers (chiropractic means "done by hand"), includes: Adjustments which entail a large number of specific thrusts ranging from slow and sinking to rapid and forceful; Mobilization, which is the slow and repeated movement of a joint within its current range of motion to stretch and exhaust the muscles so that they become too tired to hold the bones in an improper or misaligned position; and Manipulation, which involves pushing a joint rapidly and with mild force back into its proper position, taking the joint beyond its current range of motion and often producing a "pop" or "click" as carbon dioxide from cells is released. The chiropractor might also draw upon nutritional and psychological counseling, if necessary.

Probably best known for the manipulation procedure, the practice of structural adjustment of the body is what distinguishes chiropractic from other fields of medicine. Chiropractic doctors may also refer their patients to specialists in either the field of alternative medicine or western (conventional) medicine for special testing or treatment from time to time.

There are three levels to chiropractic care: acute care, the restorative phase, and the wellness phase. During the acute level, the chiropractor's objective is to reduce stress damage to the spine and nervous system. At this level, which is common when a patient is seeking help for specific health problems or is suffering from pain or other symptoms, adjustments can be as frequent as several times a week. The restorative phase begins after the spine is nearly or completely aligned, when it must be monitored to make sure it holds the adjustment for longer periods of time. After being misaligned for months or even years, the body may have a tendency to resume the habitual alignment and periodic adjustments may be required. During the wellness phase, the patient has periodic examinations or adjustments to ensure that the nerve flow is not encountering interference from new subluxations. This phase is useful as part of an optimal wellness, prevention and maintenance program, and is an effective form of stress management. It can also be used by athletes to ensure optimal performance.

Just as there are several types of structural adjustments that are made by the chiropractors, there are several types of chiropractors themselves. There are those who combine chiropractic with other therapies and disciplines (sometimes called "mixers") and those who deal only with locating and removing subluxations (called "straight chiropractors"). Within these two groups there are many variations and subgroups. In addition, a new branch of chiropractic is network

chiropractic. This emerging field advocates the detection of energy fields, suppressed emotions revealed in spinal subluxations, and the body's chakras.

The training of Chiropractors takes five years during which time medical subjects are studied to the level of General Practitioners and cover certain subjects such as neurology, orthopedics, radiology, etc.

Many health insurance companies pay for chiropractic treatment and chiropractors are recognized as primary health care professionals by the medical establishment. A unique aspect to chiropractic therapy, however, is that it can incorporate other alternative therapies in its practice, and is much more likely to do so, unlike traditional allopathic medicine.

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