

Osteopathic Philosophy

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Note: I organized the “Ten Key Concepts of Osteopathic Philosophy” based upon three decades of historical research. I have read each of A. T. Still’s four published books several times and found repetitive patterns in his teachings. I then identified recurring key words and themes allowing me to develop a more thorough description of Osteopathic Philosophy and clinical practice. These Ten Key Concepts form the distinctive foundation of Osteopathic Clinical Philosophy.

Ten Key Concepts

1. **HOLISM:** Human beings function in a dynamic state of holism, or what Andrew Taylor Still called “connected oneness.”
2. **HEALTH:** The objective in Osteopathic Treatment is not just to identify and treat disease, but to find what is healthy and utilize the biologic field of health both diagnostically and in treatment to actively engage a therapeutic process.
3. **SELF-HEALING:** The goal of an Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment is to enhance the natural ability to self-heal—or to creatively compensate—by augmenting the local and global health of the body by removing the obstructions to normal structure and function. An Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment helps to create the best possible conditions for self-healing to occur.
4. **MIND/BODY—BODY/MIND:** The body and psyche are interdependent and inseparable in disease and in health. Both have the ability to self-heal or to creatively compensate in the presence of disease, injury, illness, or other challenges. Trusting the ability of the body and psyche to self-heal forms the foundation of Osteopathic clinical practice. *The mind/body connection is not directly a part of A. T. Still’s teachings but are part of the evolution of the Osteopathic approach in health care.*
5. **STRUCTURE/FUNCTION:** The relationship between structure and function impacts the overall health of the entire body. Structure (anatomy) and function (physiology) are in equilibrium, and are interdependent and inseparable in disease and in health. Restoration of normal structure and function forms one of the foundations of Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment.
6. **NORMAL:** To fully understand abnormal conditions (disease, injury, or illness) the structure and function of what is normal for human beings in general, and for each patient in particular, must be understood. Normal is one expression of health.

7. **ANATOMY:** A precise anatomic diagnosis is made using hands-on palpation of the body. A detailed anatomic diagnosis is clinically relevant and utilized to design a patient-specific, dynamic Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment plan.

8. **MATERIAL/NONMATERIAL:** There are two distinct and interrelated ways of perceiving during Osteopathic diagnosis and treatment. The *material field* is tangible and contains the biomechanical elements that are formed by the palpable anatomy and physical functions that are objective and can be measured. The *non-material field* is invisible and refers to the subjective bioenergetic elements that underlie the material form. The non-material field is the expression of subtle functions or inherent forces. The material and non-material fields coexist simultaneously and are unified in a dynamic state of connected oneness.

9. **CAUSE/EFFECT:** Osteopathic diagnosis and treatment works to discover the cause of disease, injury, or illness rather than just treating the effects or dysfunctional compensations. Layers of cause and effect may be present creating interconnected dysfunctions that lead to complicated clinical presentations. Cause may not always be objectively known but it is important to explore creative diagnostic possibilities.

10. **PAIN:** Pain is an effect and a symptom, not a disease. If pain is exclusively treated, and there is a failure to arrive at the origins of what is causing pain, then the therapeutic actions are limited. The causes of pain are often distant from the symptoms.