

What is a D.O.?

Osteopathic Medical Education

Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment (OMT)

Privacy Information | Legal Information

D.O.s: Physicians Treating People, Not Just Symptoms

American Osteopathic Association Copyright 2003–2004

What is a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.)

If you're like most people, you've been going to a doctor since you were born and perhaps didn't know if you were seeing a D.O. (osteopathic physician) or an M.D. (allopathic physician). You may not even be aware that there are two types of complete physicians in the United States.

The fact is, both D.O.s and M.D.s are fully qualified physicians licensed to perform surgery and prescribe medication. Is there any difference between these two kinds of doctors? Yes. And no.

Read this brochure in Spanish: [Que es un D.O.?](#)

D.O.s bring something extra to medicine

- * Osteopathic medical schools emphasize training students to be primary care physicians.

- * D.O.s practice a "whole person" approach to medicine. Instead of just treating specific symptoms or illnesses, they regard your body as integrated whole.

- * Osteopathic physicians focus on preventive health care.

- * D.O.s receive extra training in the musculoskeletal system -- your body's interconnected system of nerves, muscles and bones that make up two-thirds of its body mass. This training provides osteopathic physicians with a better understanding of the ways that an injury or illness in one part of your body can affect another.

- * Osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT) is incorporated in the training and practice of osteopathic physicians. With OMT, osteopathic

physicians use their hands to diagnose injury and illness and to encourage your body's natural tendency toward good health. By combining all available medical procedures with OMT, D.O.s offer their patients the most comprehensive care available in medicine today.

More than a Century of Unique Care

Osteopathic medicine is a unique form of American medical care that was developed in 1874 by Dr. Andrew Taylor Still. Dr. Still was dissatisfied with the effectiveness of 19th Century medicine. He believed that many of the medications of his day were useless or even harmful. Dr. Still was one of the first in his time to study the attributes of good health so that he could better understand the process of disease.

In response, Dr. Still founded a philosophy of medicine based on ideas that date back to Hippocrates, the father of medicine. The philosophy focuses on the unity of all body parts. He identified the musculoskeletal system as a key element of health. He recognized the body's ability to heal itself and stressed preventive medicine, eating properly and keeping fit.

Dr. Still pioneered the concept of "wellness" more than 125 years ago. In today's terms, personal health risks--such as smoking, high blood pressure, excessive cholesterol levels, stress and other lifestyle factors--are evaluated for each individual. In coordination with appropriate medical treatment, the osteopathic physician acts as a teacher to help patients take more responsibility for their own well-being and change unhealthy patterns.

21st Century Frontier Medicine

Just as Dr. Still pioneered osteopathic medicine on the Missouri frontier in 1874, today osteopathic physicians serve as modern day medical pioneers. They continue the tradition of bringing health care to areas of greatest need:

- * Approximately 65% of all osteopathic physicians practice in primary care areas such as pediatrics, family practice, obstetrics/gynecology and internal medicine.

- * Many D.O.s fill a critical need for doctors by practicing in rural and medically underserved areas.

Today osteopathic physicians continue to be on the cutting edge of modern medicine. D.O.s combine today's medical technology with their ears, to listen compassionately to their patients; their eyes, to see their patients as whole persons; and their hands, to diagnose and treat injury as well as illness.

D.O.s and M.D.s are alike in many ways:

- * Applicants to both D.O. and M.D. medical colleges typically have a four-year undergraduate degree with an emphasis on scientific courses.

- * Both D.O.s and M.D.s complete four years of basic medical education.

- * After medical school, both D.O.s and M.D.s can choose to practice in a specialty area of medicine -- such as surgery, family practice or psychiatry--after completing a residency program (typically two to six years of additional training).

- * Both D.O.s and M.D.s must pass comparable state licensing exams.

- * D.O.s and M.D.s both practice in fully accredited and licensed health care facilities.

D.O.s comprise a separate, yet equal branch of American medical care. Together, D.O.s and M.D.s enhance the state of care available in America. It is, however, the ways that D.O.s and M.D.s are different that bring an extra dimension to your family's health care.

Additional information may be found in these other Osteopathic.org