

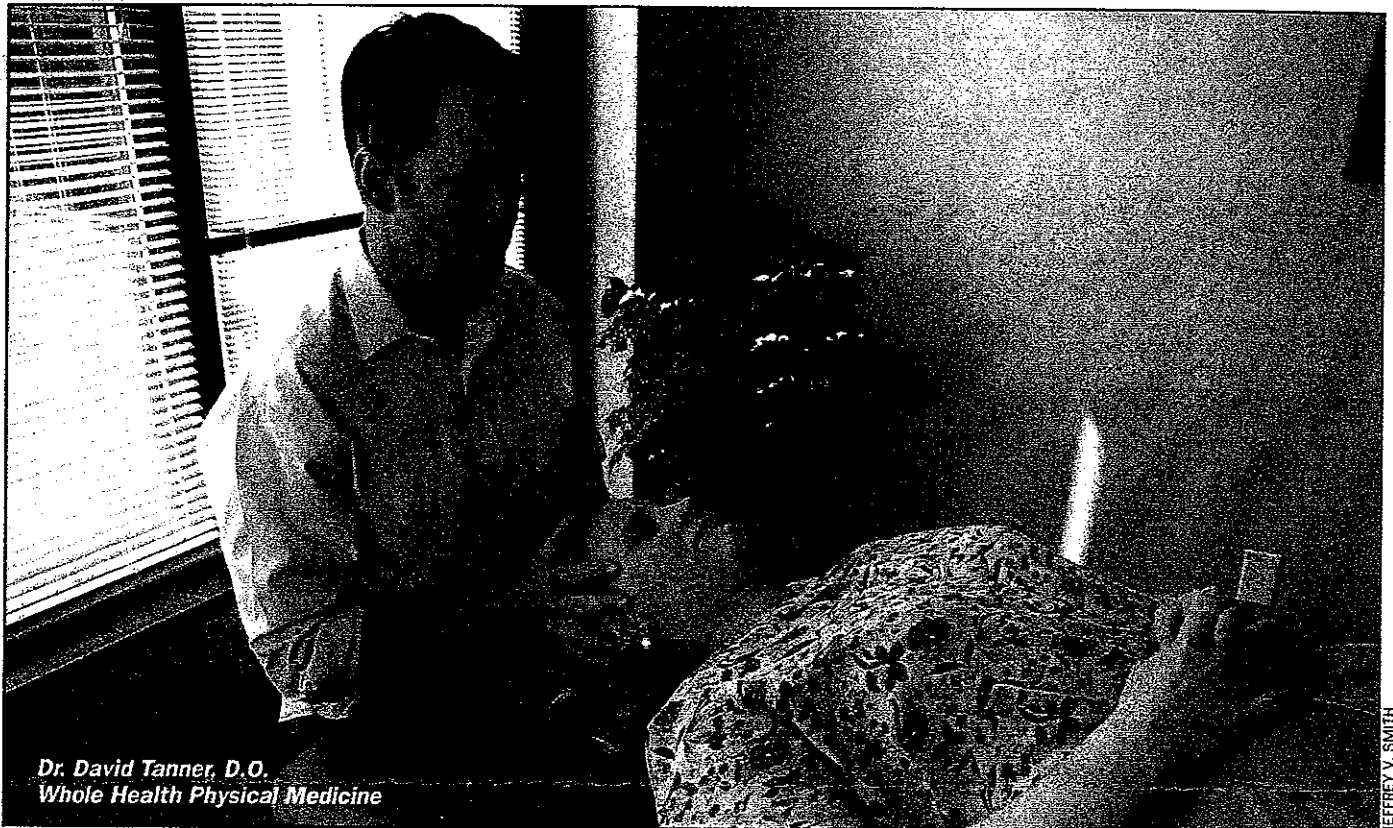
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HEALTHY LIVING

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Whole Health Physical Medicine

JEFFREY V. SMITH

Unwind Your Mind Craniosacral Therapy Is Big in Boulder

By Elizabeth Marglin

If Roling makes you roll your eyes, if deep-tissue massage makes you wince and shiatsu makes you shudder, the gentle touch of craniosacral therapy may be just what your body needs. Not that there is anything wrong with the grunts of pain and groans of pleasure that intense bodywork induces. But bodywork can be a lot more than massage; it can be a way of strengthening the central nervous system, which governs most of what goes on in the body.

Craniosacral therapy has found something of a stronghold in Boulder County, with more than 150 registered

practitioners. Their training varies from years of osteopathic study to a weekend certification program. Physical and massage therapists commonly use CST to treat insomnia, headaches, TMJ pain, stress and chronic fatigue.

The origins of CST can be traced to the early 1900s, when William Garner Sutherland, an osteopath, made a breakthrough discovery. After performing experiments on himself using special helmets that he devised, he concluded that the 28 bony plates of the cranium had a tiny movement which, when manipulated, could dramatically affect a person's health. Underlying this

movement, Sutherland believed, was a subtle pulse he called the "craniosacral rhythm" that was different from the heartbeat. He was convinced that a practitioner's touch could release restrictions to this rhythm, allowing the spinal fluid in the body to circulate more freely and improve the functioning of the nervous system.

After Sutherland's death in 1954, other osteopaths continued to develop his theories. Perhaps the best known is Florida-based John Upledger, D.O., who in the early 1970s began teaching the intricacies of this rhythm to anyone who was interested, under the trademarked name

HEALTHY LIVING Craniosacral Therapy

CranioSacral Therapy. Other schools of craniosacral therapy emerged as well, also based on Sutherland's original work. Despite much speculation and study, the origin of the movement, and even whether it truly exists, have never been determined. Skeptics assert that the skull is too hard and thick to respond to light pressure, that the cranial bones fuse by the end of adolescence, and that there is no relation between brain pulsation and general health. But people who do craniosacral work don't need convincing.

"I feel the movement and I know it's there," says David

Tanner, D.O., who practices cranial osteopathy at Whole Health Physical Medicine in Boulder. "The suture movement can be functional or dysfunctional, affecting the body on a very fundamental level. The beauty of cranial," Tanner continues, "is that it really has value in any disease process. I apply it in virtually all situations—colds, chronic pain, diseases, irritable bowel. It's not necessarily the whole treatment, but it's usually part of the treatment."

During a session, which lasts between 30 minutes and an hour, you can expect a slight pressure (the rule of thumb is no more than 5 grams, or the weight of a nickel) on your head or some other area of your body. The hands are held there, often without moving, until the practitioner feels a release.

Because of the complexity of the cranium, some CST proponents believe that only osteopaths are qualified to practice the work. Others think it's more about the sensitivity of the hands than the medical degree. "Whether the therapeutic relationship is fruitful has a lot more to do with who the practitioner is, not the training or the school," CST practitioner Charles Swenson says.

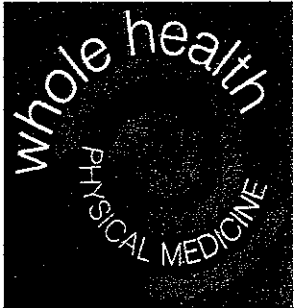
It can also depend on how sensitive you are. In the view of Larry Eckstein, a Boulder-based M.D., craniosacral therapy "is very helpful for certain people—people who do great with subtle, light work. But it's not for everybody. Some people don't feel anything." Yet even if the recipient doesn't feel as if anything "happened," that doesn't necessarily mean that the treatment wasn't effective. "You may have no perceptible response at the time, but feel positive consequences down the line," Eckstein adds.

John Chitty, RCST, the founder of Colorado School of Energy Studies, believes the true power of the therapy comes from the patient. His school teaches a "biodynamic" approach to CST. "The healing does not come from the practitioner," Chitty explains. "The theory is there is an intelligence in the system that knows how to fix itself."

If you are interested in trying CST, ask an alternative health practitioner you trust for a recommendation. You may find that nothing seems to happen. Or, as CST student Merlin Arbor found, "My emotional state is more even—I don't freak out anymore."

It just shows that a little rhythm may go a long way. ●

Dr. Gayle F. Bereskin • Dr. David E. Tanner



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