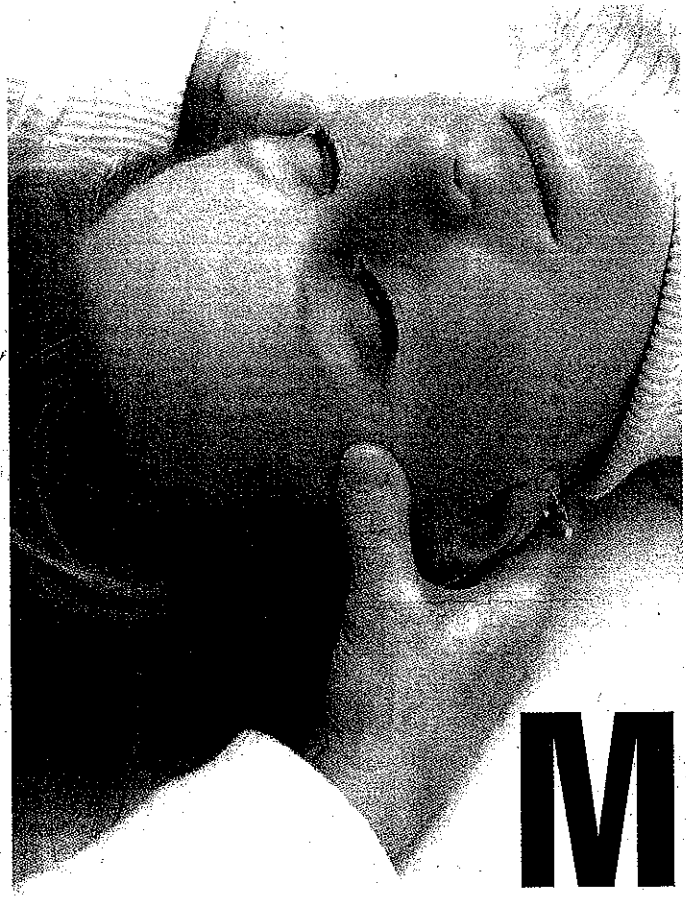


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While undergoing her first craniosacral therapy session with Sharon Henderson (shown below) of Merrimac, client Michelle Schena (left) said she felt things release in her lower back when Henderson touched the base of her neck. Henderson is a licensed massage therapist who went on to become certified in craniosacral therapy.

Massaging the MIND



Unlocking the mystery of craniosacral therapy

By Jean MacDougall-Tattan
Staff Writer

There are 58 craniosacral therapists between Lawrence, Methuen, Andover, North Andover, Groveland, West Newbury, Merrimac and Newburyport, yet what they do is somewhat of a mystery to most people.

Craniosacral therapists believe that the body does not heal itself of injury partly because the memory of the event that caused the injury (the mind) keeps the area tight in order to protect it.

Slight pressure — described as the weight of a nickel — is placed on points along the spinal column where the problem originates, and the pressure causes an emotional, as well as a physical, release.

“Craniosacral therapy is a gentle approach that integrates the mind and body,” said Tom McDonough, a Methuen practitioner, who holds a master’s degree in divinity. “I may gently move an arm during a therapy session and they say, ‘That’s when I fell off the swing.’”

The technique was developed by Dr. John E. Upledger, an osteopathic physician who while

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fluid that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord.

The theory behind craniosacral therapy is that spinal fluid moves up and down the spinal column with a rhythm of its own — like our breathing and heart rates have their own rhythm.

The focus is working with the head, spinal column and sacrum to keep the rhythm of the spinal fluid at its optimal level. The light touch required with cranial sacral therapy allows the therapist to feel the rhythm of the spinal fluid.

and even emotional difficulties, learning disabilities, colic and even post-traumatic stress disorder. McDonough said that part of healing is good circulation and tension slows that process. He said the therapy creates a meditative state that allows clients to remember the car accident without re-tensing the body.

Sharon Henderson, a licensed massage therapist in Merrimac, went on for craniosacral training through the Upledger Institute.

Henderson transformed her garage in Merrimac into a therapy area complete with water pond, aromatherapy and soothing music.

“We develop holding patterns from trauma, falls, emotional trauma and surgical procedures — there is so much the body does because it remembers trauma and the deeper tension patterns need to be released,” Henderson said.

Spinal fluid moves up and down the spinal column in anywhere from six to 12 cycles per minute, Henderson said.

“A low number of cycles indicates an impaired immune system. The movement is a pulsation — if it’s low you’re likely to catch anything that comes around the corner,” Henderson said. “As tension is released, the body corrects itself and the craniosacral rhythm is able to right itself.”

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ther because it adjusts soft tissue, like membranes that also surround the nerves, so there is more improved circulation and even nervous system function.

Patients who receive craniosacral treatments lay on a table fully-clothed. Appointments can last anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour and a half for new patients.

Practitioners say they see results on patients who have been in accidents and say that when pressure is placed on some patients they verbalize what happened during old injuries.

Henderson fell on the ice as a teenager and was unconscious with a concussion. Later as an adult, she received craniosacral therapy. During a session she remembered the incident and a conversation that took place between her friends as she lay unconscious on the ice.

"I remembered her saying that I was going to die," Henderson said. Following the session she asked that friend if she did indeed say that, and she said she

did, Henderson said.

While undergoing her first craniosacral therapy session with Henderson, client Michelle (Shelley) Schena said she felt things release in her lower back when Henderson touched the base of her neck.

In Henderson's experience, patients with TMJ respond well to craniosacral therapy as well as patients with whiplash, and concussions, though there is no scientific data that proves it works.

McDonough has seen the results it can have on TMJ patients.

"TMJ is an area where we see significant results. It's very help-

ful in correcting imbalance in muscles which cause misalignment in the bite — ideally you want to fix the muscles and then allow the orthodontist to align the bite," said McDonough.

Both McDonough and Henderson said they have helped clients as young as newborns with colic, infants with recurrent ear infections, children with conditions

like autism and attention deficit disorder and elders who need help healing from a fall.

McDonough said the cost of a session varies with the credentials of the practitioner. He said it is practiced by chiropractors, massage therapists, occupational therapists and physical therapists, to name a few.

"It depends on their rate struc-

ture, but the range is anywhere from \$50 to \$75," McDonough said.

Insurance pays for craniosacral therapy only if it is covered under physical therapy or done as part of treatment by a chiropractor or physician or in some instances, by approved care through a massage therapist.

Certification is done by the

Therapy: Craniosacral massage integrates mind and body

Upledger Institute as well as schools such as the Integral School of Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy in North Beach, Fla. and the Cranial Therapy Education Trust College of Craniosacral Therapy in England.

For more information on craniosacral therapy you can visit www.upledger.com.