

South China Morning Post

[Style / Well-Being](#)

Chiropractic, Zentherapy, craniosacral treatments: what are they, and why are more of us turning to such alternative therapies?

The holistic health and wellness craze has led to a surge of interest alternative therapies; three Hong Kong-based practitioners explain what chiropractic, Zentherapy and craniosacral treatments involve



[Lim Li Ying](#)

Published: 2:00pm, 8 Jan, 2020



Richard Girolami practises Zen bodytherapy. Photos: Handouts

Holistic health and wellness were the buzzwords of 2019, and there was a boom in alternative treatments such as acupuncture, craniosacral therapy and chiropractic medicine.

Neal Miller, a Los Angeles-based certified acupuncturist, told Healthline Media that “In the past few years many hospitals have included TCM acupuncture to treat many conditions, Cleveland Clinic, UCLA and Kaiser to name a few. Today the referrals are often from medical doctors and other health care providers and institutions ... more than half of my patients see me as their primary health care provider and all accept me as part of their health care team.”

While acupuncture and chiropractic treatments have become more acceptable, other alternative forms of medical treatment such as Zentherapy, Rolfing and craniosacral therapy are relatively new to mass knowledge.

Zentherapy was founded by William “Dub” Leigh, who worked at the Esalen Residency Training programme in Big Sur, California as well as with Zen master Tanouye Rotaishi for seven years. Zentherapy is seen as a combination of Rolfing, neuromuscular reeducation and Rotaishi’s ki training. This is essentially a kind of massage therapy “in advanced practice”, according to findings in *Complementary Medicine in Clinical Practice* by David Rakel and Nancy Faass. This examination into advanced massages, including Rolfing, says that credible resources for massage therapies, such as The Touch Research Institutes at the University of Miami School of Medicine, have found these therapies beneficial for reducing stress “and its potentially damaging effects on the body”, including back pain, breast cancer, multiple sclerosis, as well as burn injuries.

Craniosacral therapy is a form of massage – or more like touch therapy – that also delves into energy work. NCBI research found that “positive clinical outcomes were reported for pain reduction and improvement in general well-being of patients” in research into the effects of craniosacral therapy, but there is still a lot of ground to cover in terms of research into the health benefits of these alternative therapies. One evaluation by chiropractic and manual therapies in 2006 suggested that craniosacral therapy should no longer be taught in osteopathy colleges until further evidence of its effectiveness, while further research by NCBI in 2012 revealed a “paucity of CST [craniosacral therapy] research in patients with different clinical pathologies”.

We break down three types of alternative therapies with the help of some Hong Kong-based practitioners.

Chiropractic

Registered chiropractor Dr Michelle Zhou McCulloch, who runs a clinic in Hong Kong, says: “Chiropractors are trained to address neuro-musculoskeletal complaints – this means nerve-related issues (such as sciatica, and pins and needles down your arm), muscle and joint-related pain (such as all types of spinal pain, knee pain, frozen shoulder and tendinitis). Chiropractic care does not involve taking medication or surgery, which makes it an effective treatment option for various physical pains that arise during pregnancy.



Michelle Zhou McCulloch works on alleviating lower back pain.

“The cause of many chronic complaints that arise from our modern lifestyle is often multidimensional and the best care plan or option I can provide to my patients involves more than one type of treatment. For example, a sleep-deprived busy individual with a gruelling travel schedule comes in with chronic neck pain and associated headaches. After a full history and examination, I will provide appropriate chiropractic treatment for the neck pain and headaches, and I may recommend him/her to see a Chinese Medicine practitioner to address the poor

sleep, and also a muscle therapist to address chronic scar tissue that has built up in the muscle due to poor long-term posture.

“This way, the recovery can be faster and more complete. The patient also comes away with a deeper understanding and awareness of his/her own body and will know to better take care of him/herself in the future.”



Michelle Zhou McCulloch

I attended one of the clinic’s posture classes and was surprised by the many unconscious habits that creep into our everyday postures – and I practise yoga daily.

“The most common complaints we address in a chiropractor’s office are lower back pain, neck pain and headaches. In Hong Kong, there is also an increasing trend related to postural issues arising from overuse or incorrect use of technology like our smartphone and iPad. There is a lot of mixed information on the internet, and I find many of my patients come in with ideas that they read online that are completely incorrect. So finding a registered health professional that you trust to guide you is crucial.”

Find someone professionally trained to assess your posture, and look at your own lifestyle and find areas you can improve on

-Dr Michelle Zhou McCulloch

Zhou offered some tips:

“Find someone professionally trained to assess your posture, and look at your own lifestyle and find areas you can improve on – for example, you may need less screen time, better posture when using your smartphone, better work ergonomics. For areas you cannot change, such as level of work intensity, work travel, types of work you do, do something regularly that can combat the negative effect. Gentle stretching, Pilates, posture correction classes and meditation all help.”

Zentherapy



Richard Girolami

“The work I am doing is a mix of modern and traditional therapies. We focus on awareness, breath and structural balance, not restricted to any particular technique. The skeleton, muscles, fascia, energy and emotions are all options to work with depending on the individual and situation.”

Richard Girolami flies all over the world to work on the bodies of renowned entrepreneurs and Silicon Valley leaders, but his demeanour immediately puts one at ease. His background in kinesiology and Traditional Chinese Medicine informs what he does – but that is merely skimming the surface. “The first question I usually ask is, ‘What change would you like to make?’”

“Zentherapy is one of my biggest influences. The work of William ‘Dub’ Leigh, Audrey Nakamura and the instructors and practitioners who have taken the time and energy to share it with me have enriched my life, both professionally and personally. It is with gratitude and respect that I share some of the details and history of this work.”

I had a brief experience with Rolfing before I met Girolami (Rolfing, a technique that is, in Michelle Zhou’s words, “an effective type of myofascial therapy for reducing chronic muscle adhesion and restore normal muscle function”) and asked him whether his therapy is similar or integrative to his techniques.



Richard Girolami

A quote from the work of Dub Leigh helps explain: “Zentherapy recognises that from birth to death, life is a flow of energy. This energy takes shape by our attitudes, our emotions, and our bodies. Zentherapy releases the natural form of the body from the aberrations caused by physical, chemical, psychological and spiritual traumas.”

“[It] is a synthesis from Eastern and Western cultures,” says Girolami. “Many different methods and techniques are used to process the body; this includes the work of my teachers Ida Rolf, Moshe Feldenkrais, Lauren Berry and Raymond Nimmo.

“We are two humans here right now and the goal is to have both practitioner and client be free from blockages, pain and moving freely.”

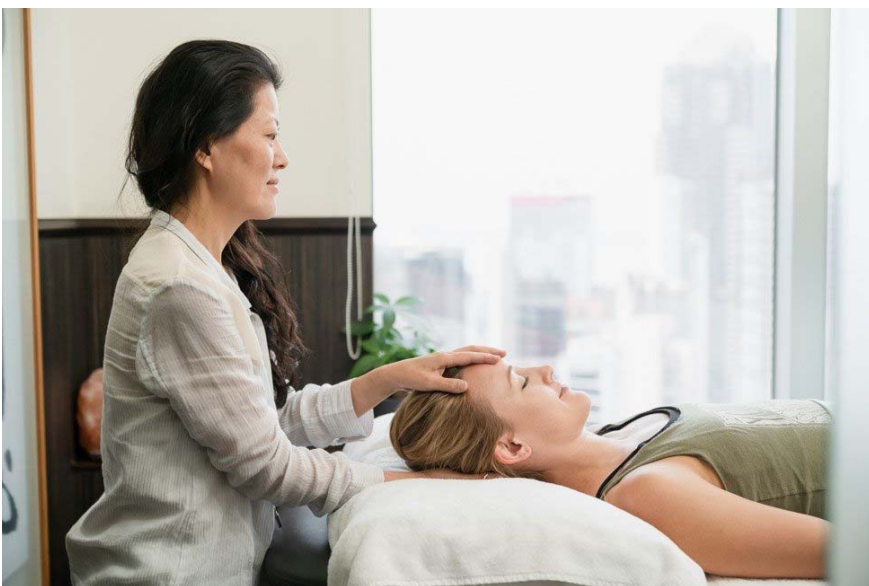
Throughout the hour-long session Girolami asks how my body feels. “Working through uncomfortable, unbalanced, blocked or difficult areas using the breath has multiple benefits. Structurally the body is softer, better organised and more in alignment, but the process also offers benefits to the nervous system and can be a way for people to slow down the mind, work on anxiety, nervousness, stress, traumas, or even panic attacks.”

Zentherapy recognises that from birth to death, life is a flow of energy. This energy takes shape by our attitudes, our emotions, and our bodies.

-From the work of William ‘Dub’ Leigh, founder of Zentherapy

While there is no specific evidence out there yet about the benefits and effectiveness of the treatment, there is definitely much to be explored and a growing interest – the establishment of the International Zentherapy Institute in Berkeley, California is providing training with the strictest regulations – certified practitioners are required to frequently review their Zentherapy training.

Craniosacral therapy



Michell See

Craniosacral therapy probably came to light through some plaudits that have come from celebrity Brooke Shields and Canadian gridiron player Ricky Williams, and delves into traumatic experiences that may have shaped the patient's body and formed the pain they are experiencing.

Dr Michell See, who has a practice at Balance Health in Hong Kong, explains: "Craniosacral is a gentle and non-invasive touch therapy. It is performed on a massage bed and the client is fully clothed. Craniosacral provides a therapeutic touch in a safe and fluid space that allows a holistic shift either physiologically or psychologically. This is vital to a greater connection between our body, mind and soul as a whole."

Craniosacral therapy relies on the philosophy that the body heals itself naturally, and therefore, See says, makes it great for all ages and genders, including newborns. "We are all formed by our past life experiences, for example, birth traumas, accidents, drugs, abuses and wars. If these issues are not resolved, our body will experience a lot of physical and emotional pain in a long run. Craniosacral is a powerful tool to allow our system to be aware of these experiences gradually and to facilitate holistic change. Hence it's most helpful for insomnia, stress, anxiety, hormonal imbalance and pain management."



Michell See

While we were in therapy, I felt tingling sensations around the crown of my head while See was touching my scalp. I asked See what it was, and she said, "Relational field in a fluid space is a key point in craniosacral work. This is where a therapeutic space is established between clients and practitioners. Through a neutral and non-judgemental relationship, we are communicating with each other. Our neural system is very complex. We have trillions of neurons travelling between the brain and the spinal cord to give us physical and sensation feedback. Neurons are in an electrical wiring and wavy in nature. Our brain is bathed in a cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). When the scalp was touched, our spaces were deepened into the relationship of your neural cavity, and that explains why you felt [a tingling sensation]."

Craniosacral provides a therapeutic touch in a safe and fluid space that allows a holistic shift either physiologically or psychologicallyDr

-Michell See

"I usually prefer to start with holding the feet. Our bodies are mostly structured in a longitudinal manner, which is our rhythmical tidal and fluid expression, [a bit] like the ebb and flow of waves on the ocean. I also prefer to

end with a head hold. This allows the central nervous system to settle deeply into stillness. It is a perfect healing space to end the session.”

It is best to ensure that your craniosacral practitioner is licensed. Zhou, who is no stranger of working with health professionals from different practices, warns: “It is a gentle but powerful technique when performed properly by trained health practitioners. However there are also less trained therapists using this terminology, so it is important to distinguish the difference and seek out Cranial Sacral Therapy from registered professionals such as a physiotherapist, chiropractor and osteopath.”

<https://www.scmp.com/magazines/style/well-being/article/3045027/chiropractic-zentherapy-craniosacral-treatments-what-are>