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CranioSacrally Speaking: The Significance Detector

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CranioSacral Therapy (CST) relies on the therapist's ability to palpate subtle body sensations, particularly the rhythm of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) as it pulses through the craniosacral system at about six to 12 cycles per minute. That rhythm is a key indicator practitioners use to locate and release restrictions in the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord.

Another important way therapists use this rhythm is to gauge the significance of different types of internal physiological events. When a client's body is involved in a significant process, it has long been observed that the craniosacral rhythm will come to a sudden stop. We call this abrupt halt of the craniosacral rhythm the, "significance detector."

Unlike a "still point," in which the CSF seems to gently and naturally come to a rest, with the significance detector it feels as if the fluid has run into a solid obstruction. This sensation generally indicates that the client's body is going through some type of significant underlying event. It could be one of self-correction, practitioner-assisted correction, self-discovery or even practitioner- assisted discovery.

Whatever the case may be, as a CST practitioner, you can use the significance detector to determine when a client's physiological reactions are crucial to the therapeutic process and not merely resistance or a superficial distraction arising from the client's defense mechanism.

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I take the significance detector to mean that something good is happening in the client's body, and whatever it is has either just arrived in the patient's conscious awareness or is just outside the boundary and about to enter. The instant I feel the craniosacral rhythm stop, I might ask the client, "What is in your mind right now?" I tell the individual not to worry about how silly it may seem, but ask them to tell me what was in their mind the instant I asked the question.

The client usually has some difficulty answering. It may feel like the thought was more like a dream, gone from awareness in a fraction of a second. It's a little like playing musical chairs. The music stops, and you awkwardly scramble for a chair. With practice, however, you get better. Soon, when the music stops, you know precisely where you are in relation to the chair. The same is true with clients and the significance detector. Initially, the client may not be able to tell you what is going on at the precise instant you ask, but with practice he or she can improve.


Often, when the craniosacral rhythm comes to an abrupt stop, it signifies that the client is in the same body position in which a physical trauma originally occurred. Again, it is common at this point for the client to begin receiving internal memories, visualizations, and even sounds.

When these therapeutic images occur, we offer them the chance to transmit their meanings by gently initiating dialogue with them. We do not use a demanding, questioning form of dialogue, but rather a friendly, conversational approach that allows the client's inner wisdom to lead the way. The stops and starts in craniosacral rhythmical activity then allow the practitioner to explore yes-and-no health-related questions in an effort to get to the root of the physiological problem.

Over the decades that I have used this system of exploration and verification, it has proven to be extremely reliable. It is also used and trusted by most practitioners of CST at the intermediate level and above.

Clearly, the significance detector enables each client who receives CST to be a teacher to the therapist. Thus, the therapist experiences new adventures every day.

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