



Beach Cities

Yoga, Pilates
& Other Health
Classes

Page 16

Winter 2004

Full Body Fitness

Center for Health & Healing | 6
Free enrollment in January

Craniosacral Therapy | 8

Help for Hips & Joints | 10

Fun Sports for Kids | 14

Holiday Gift Ideas | 8

Clases en Español | 19

#200402A

Craniosacral Therapy

Unleashing the healing power of the body



Alternative therapy attempts to unleash the power of the body's natural rhythm

The auto accident happened in the middle of the night on a dark stretch of Interstate 26 in South Carolina last May. Barbara Knight didn't see her life flash before her eyes. What she saw were her feet as they went over her head toward the back seat of the car. The car that rammed into the back of Knight's Suburban was traveling at nearly 100 mph, driven by a teenager racing his buddies on the nearly deserted highway. The force of the impact caused Knight's car to flip over and send it careening out of control into a dirt embankment. Bruised and bleeding, Knight broke the front windshield and pulled herself out of the wreckage.

"My right shoulder was jammed in, my left hip was jammed in, my neck was a total mess," she said, recalling the accident recently. "It was hard to put sentences together or react to anything quickly. One side of my brain

wasn't talking to the other side."

Returning home to Southern California, Knight made an appointment with Karen Axelrod, a craniosacral therapist practicing in Redondo Beach. The results amazed Knight.

"I don't know what she did, but she fixed it," Knight said. "I was in parts. I was all misaligned. She put me back together. It's a magical thing. That's all I can say."

Craniosacral therapy is an alternative medical treatment that was developed in the 1930s by osteopathic physician William Sutherland and refined in the 1970s by Florida osteopath John E. Upledger.

The goal of the treatment is to help the body's natural healing mechanisms overcome the negative effects of stress on the central nervous system. Practitioners focus on the craniosacral system, the membranes and cerebrospinal fluid that surround the brain and

spinal cord, extending from the bones of the skull (the cranium) down to the tailbone area (the sacrum).

Upledger teaches his students that the craniosacral system has its own rhythm, which causes the brain to contract and expand at a rate of about eight to 12 times per minute. Using a gentle touch, therapists believe they can monitor the rhythm at key points in the body to pinpoint the source of an obstruction or stress. They then attempt to assist the movement of the fluid and surrounding tissue to remove the restriction and help the body heal itself.

Clinical data in support of craniosacral therapy is hard to find.

A double-blind trial underway at the University of Arizona is being conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of craniosacral therapy for the treatment of inflammation of the



Karen Axelrod and client Barbara Knight.



"I can feel the difference in the circulation in my head. I can almost feel my hair follicles."

inner ear in young children. And Upledger has conducted his own studies to back up his assertions. But the primary source of information about the treatment tends to be anecdotal – like Knight's experience.

Axelrod discovered craniosacral therapy four years ago, when she was looking to change careers.

"I was in high tech corporate communications for 15 years and I loved that field, but I was looking for something different," she said. "Something that would engage my heart and soul, and not just my brain."

While studying to become a certified massage therapist, Axelrod heard about craniosacral therapy from an instructor. After attending a class sponsored by the Upledger Institute, she decided to devote herself to the practice.

Since she opened her office Axelrod has seen a steady increase in clients seeking an alternative treatment for stress reduction and management. Craniosacral therapy is effective, she believes, because it focuses on the root of a problem, not just the symptoms.

"A lot of the people I see have gone the

way of western medicine and have gotten to the end of the road, and their doctor says he can't do any more for them," she said. "Craniosacral therapy is really great for people who have exhausted all other avenues, the western medicine avenues."

Although Axelrod has achieved dramatic results in her work with Knight, she doesn't do anything overtly dramatic when she performs craniosacral therapy.

During a recent session she took Knight's head in her hands and gently held it for a few moments. Then she ran her hands over the woman's torso, pausing over her left hip when she felt a pulse of energy. Then, for the next hour, Axelrod moved quietly from feet to back to hips to neck, using light pressure to adjust the energy flow.

Afterwards, Knight said she felt renewed.

"It works," she said. "My body is so happy. It's like having a massage but my whole body is separated and I can feel it relaxing and growing and becoming energized. I can feel the difference in the circulation in my head. I can almost feel my hair follicles."

Axelrod spends much of the session listening to her clients' bodies. She feels the

craniosacral rhythm and follows its cues.

"It's not hard to feel the rhythm at all. You've probably felt it in your own body and wondered what it was," she said. "It's a tide-like motion. You can feel the rhythm and you can feel if it's a little bit off or weak."

With the right manipulation, the flow of the fluid can be adjusted and enhanced, she said. Then, the body will begin to heal itself.

"No condition or illness has to be permanent," she said. "I believe that for everything from a headache to cancer. The body is constantly changing and the body's main goal is to maintain homeostasis, the healthy balance, the healthy state of being."

Craniosacral therapy workshop

Join Karen Axelrod, certified craniosacral therapist, to learn how this therapy can help numerous disorders, including headaches, depression and back pain. Workshop will be held Wednesday, March 3, 6:30–8:00 p.m. in the Beach Cities Health Center. For more information call (310) 374-3426, ext. 126, or see page 17. To reach Karen Axelrod directly, call (310) 376-0113.