

Osteopathic Wellness Center

HELPING NEWBORNS TO TEENAGERS TO BETTER HEALTH

by Lois Alcosser

Remember the phrase “growing pains”? It’s hardly ever used anymore but it describes symptoms that children experience as their anatomy changes. For some children, chronic ear infections, persistent headaches and irritability can be traced to their bones and muscles, where structural restrictions, damage caused by sports injuries or muscular tension impede circulation, often blocking the immune system and causing health problems.

Delayed development, learning disorders, dyslexia are some of the many conditions that are treated at the Osteopathic Wellness Center in Ridgefield. Dr. David Johnston, the center’s founding physician, has helped children from newborns to young adults with non-invasive, hands-on, gentle therapy aimed at restoring the body’s normal healing response. “The goal is to find the source of the problem, make the patient feel better and help the body heal itself,” he said. “This is done with sensitive cradling of spine, skull and sacrum and gentle pressure on restricted tissues. This is not like going to the doctor and ‘getting a shot.’ I’ve found that most children are very comfortable and relaxed during treatment. They seem to sense that they are going to feel good again.”

Dr. Lisa Preston, an osteopathic physician at the center, notes that she is seeing many more concussions in children lately, due to sports. “A concussion is a bruising of the brain, caused by severe impact. Post-concussion children can react badly to light. Noises can become unbearable and there can actually be changes of personality and behavior. Osteopathic treatment can make all the difference.”

Osteopaths are often confused with chiropractors, but the range of treatment is not the same. Osteopathic physicians are medical doctors; they study anatomy as would a surgeon. In addition to medical school, they have had extensive training in manual manipulation to improve entire bodily function, not simply mobility. Dr. Johnston’s pediatric experience includes traumas of birth, sucking difficulties, colic, chronic infections and allergies. Osteopathy can treat developmental delays in young children who are slow to speak or walk.

Doctors Johnston and Preston have hundreds of case histories and thankful patients, who often come to them after trying many discouraging remedies. Dr. Preston had a patient who was the father of a newborn. “He came in because of terrible headaches. It turned out that he hadn’t been sleeping because his newborn had been screaming every three hours each night due to colic. I was able to help the baby sleep through the night and end



Dr. David Johnston treats Sadie Drahzal with gentle hands-on therapy to restore her body’s normal healing process.
– Bryan Haeffele

the father’s headaches.”

Another patient, a 10-year-old boy, had an anger problem that was causing serious difficulty at school and even worse behavior at home. Osteopathic treatment calmed and balanced his nervous system. The cause was anatomical, not psychological or social.

A young patient devoted to figure skating kept hurting one foot, keeping him from skating his best. Since the boy had Olympic ambitions, it was a serious handicap. Osteopathic treatment and guidance about technique solved the problem.

Dr. Johnston says he always wanted to be a doctor. “I’ve always been interested in health and wellness. I found that osteopathy chose me. I embraced it because I saw that the results helped body, mind and spirit. When a patient complains of an earache, pills are usually prescribed. We search for the root cause and by balancing the nervous system and improving drainage, we open up circulation, assist the immune system and relieve pain.”

Dr. Johnston has three children aged 2, 5 and 7. “So I know you have to talk to a child like a little person, assuring them you’re not going to poke or prod,” he said. “Sometimes I have to chase them around the room to treat them, but some children are so relaxed they fall asleep on the treatment table. Treating children requires much less time than treating adults. Their systems are so malleable. The energy in kids organizes more quickly.”

Structural restrictions can be the cause of developmental delays, causing children to be sluggish in speech and walking. A treat-

ed child will progress faster. The number of visits varies, depending on the extent of the problem. Often one or two visits are enough. Every treatment is individualized. A teenage patient who slipped in the shower and hit the front of her head required several visits. It’s important for parents to know that a slight structural malformation can become scoliosis if neglected.

Adults come to the center as well as children. Problems during pregnancy, such as back or groin pain and digestive upsets, can be successfully treated. This past winter, there were lots of bad backs from shoveling snow or chopping ice.

Dr. Preston clarified the much-used word “inflammation,” which seems to be a major culprit in all parts of the body. “Inflammation is the body’s healing mechanism, but sometimes it’s over-zealous. When there’s an injury, the white blood cells are mobilized to heal. They send out chemicals that go to the affected tissues, causing swelling. Inflammation occurs when the body’s healing mechanism overreacts.”

The Osteopathic Wellness Center traces many problems to toxins in the diet, air, and water and suggests detoxification programs to restore health. The mission is to help people heal on many levels, engaging the whole person. “We love what we do,” Dr. Johnston says. That’s apparent in his desire to improve children’s quality of life while preventing future problems.

The Osteopathic Wellness Center is at 158 Danbury Road, Ridgefield; 203-438-9915; osteopathicwellness.net.