

A higher level of care.



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Osteopathic care offers a holistic alternative

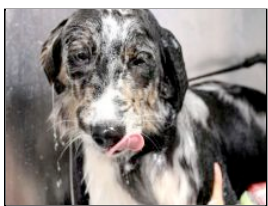
Robert Miller, Staff Writer Published 06:28 p.m., Monday, September 13, 2010

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RIDGEFIELD -- At the beginning of this year, Lisa Reeves learned why she had such powerful, pressure-ridden headaches, and why she was so exhausted all of the time. Part of her brain was herniating out of her skull into her spinal column.

"My spinal fluid wasn't circulating the way it should," she said.

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Reeves, 42, lives in South Salem, N.Y. She and her husband Roy own the Bissell House restaurant in town and have two children.

Her condition is called Chiari malformation type 1. The doctors she talked to said surgery was the best alternative to correct the malformation. The best, except that surgery isn't always successful and she would need six months of recuperation to recover from it.

"I was terrified of that," she said.

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Enter the Internet. On it, she found that osteopathic medicine treats Chiari malformation using cranialsacral therapy -- an extremely gentle form of manipulation to create a therapeutic response in the body. She then found that Dr. David Johnston, an osteopath, had an office near the center of town.

"And he accepted my insurance, to cap it all off," she said.

Beginning in May, she began to get regular treatments at the Osteopathic Wellness Center -- Johnston's office on Danbury Road.

"It was unbelievable," she said. "I would go in with a headache and leave pain-free. And I have so much energy. By now, I am completely symptom-free."

For the past 10 years now, Johnston has been practicing the gentle science of osteopathy -- an American medical discipline that dates back to the mid-19th century. His practice has grown so much that he has a new, expanded suite of offices. He also has the help of Serafim Kotsogiannis, a massage therapist, and Dr. Lisa Preston,

an osteopath who works part-time with Johnston and part-time as an emergency department physician at St. John's Riverside Hospital in Yonkers

"You have a car accident, you go to an emergency room," Preston said. "You have whiplash after an accident, you want to come here."

Preston can moved back and forth in both fields because she's fully trained to do both.

Like other fields of care, osteopathy is a medical discipline. Osteopathic doctors go to medical school. They can work in hospitals and write prescriptions. In fact, Johnston said, many osteopaths are now practicing Western medicine exclusively.

Johnston and Preston, however, still practices the hands-on manipulations that are the basis of osteopathy.

Osteopathy works on the externals -- the connections between bone, soft muscle, and

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connective tissue. Through subtle, very gentle manipulations, they are able to treat chronic pain, neurological ailments, and many other illnesses.

Johnston and Preston practice a fully holistic form of medicine, stressing nutrition and exercise as well as therapy. They ask a lot of question before they begin treatment.

"An initial treatment can last an hour," Johnston said. "It's a whole body approach. I help a lot of people with weight loss and detoxification. We can help people with digestive problems by helping them change their diet."

Peter Schacter, 55, of Danbury, and the soccer coach at [Western Connecticut State University](#) in Danbury, began to go to Johnston for help with the pain of a herniated disk in the lumbar region of his back. But, he explained, he was also suffering from residual anger and depression after a death in his family.

Johnston, he said, paid attention to all aspects of his life.

"I was looking for an alternative therapy," Schacter said. "Osteopathy was, and is, non-invasive. His manipulations are very subtle. But they can be very powerful tools."

Schacter said after his first session, Johnston told him his body would be telling him it needed sleep.

"I went home, got sleepy at 7:30 p.m. and slept for 11 hours," he said.

The treatments, he said, have helped his back. But they've also had an almost spiritual dimension as well.

"It seems like there's mutual things going on," Schacter said.

Gene Rosen went to see Johnson for treatment of sleep apnea.

"The first night, I slept through the night," he said "My wife and I laughed, thinking it was just one night. But something changed." His apnea went away.

More recently, Rosen, 67, of the Sandy Hook section of Newtown, returned to the osteopathic center after four days of spreading mulch left his neck in agony. This time, Preston treated him.

"She knew exactly where the spot was," Rosen said. "But she also told me, 'You've got to start doing yoga, or Pilates. You've got to start an exercise program.' It's a partnership and I like that."

Johnston, who got his degree from the [New York College of Osteopathic Medicine](#) on Long Island, was always drawn to osteopathy's holistic traditions.

Preston, who also went to New York College of Osteopathic Medicine, completed her residency requirements to be both an emergency room physician and an internist, only to realize how much she missed practicing the gentle, healing touch with which she'd started.

"Now, I get the best of both worlds," Preston said. "I get to practice Western medicine in the emergency department and holistic medicine here."

And, by word of mouth, and by the Internet, people find their way to her and Johnston.

"Osteopathy is medicine's best kept secret," she said

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