Correcting the misperceptions surrounding osteopathic medicine

During the past 20 years, osteopathic medicine has experienced explosive growth, making it the most rapidly expanding health profession during that period. In 1969, there were slightly more than 13,000 DOs. Today, we number approximately 29,000 strong. Our growth can be attributed, in part, to the public's demand for primary care physicians.

A great majority of osteopathic physicians practice general practice medicine. We provide care to an estimated 10% of all Americans. Osteopathic physicians represent 20% of all family doctors in the United States. DOs serve as physicians in the armed services, and the public health service, on professional sports teams, and even in the Olympics. Despite all these accomplishments, our role in society remains greatly misunderstood. Many people believe that the MD is the only comprehensive healthcare professional in America.

See Dr Murray Goldstein's article, beginning on **page 157**.

The misperceptions surrounding our profession require reiteration and clarification of the osteopathic medical philosophy, which is based on the Hippocratic philosophy of medicine.

Paramount to our philosophy is a recognition that the physical body, mind, and spirit are a triumvirate that forms one human, biological unit. Nature's healing power provides the body with the ability to maintain health and combat disease. Furthermore, the integrity of the musculoskeletal system proves critical for maintaining good health. Therefore, mechanical disorders of the musculoskeletal system can affect all body functions. In turn, such malfunctions hinder the body's natural ability to sustain health.

Of all these components, the musculoskeletal element has been the most misconstrued. At times, it has been distorted to suggest that the osteopathic physicians' training and practice are limited. In fact, DOs receive as comprehensive training as modern medicine permits. Our training encompasses all branches of medicine and surgery. With a particular emphasis on health promotion and disease prevention, we can and do contribute something more to the healthcare of all Americans.

Nearly 100 years after the first osteopathic medical college was founded, approximately 7000 students are enrolled at today's 15 colleges of osteopathic medicine. Most of these future physicians will end up practicing in small towns and in rural areas.

Clearly, the basic philosophy expressed in osteopathic medicine, a holistic approach to health promotion and disease prevention, a focus on primary care, and a return to people-oriented, rather than disease-oriented, care is an idea whose time has come. Rheumatologists, neurologists, and sports medicine physicians, along with primary care physicians, are recognizing the importance of the musculoskeletal system and manipulative treatment for structural and mechanical disorders.

An organized medical philosophy for the past 100 years, osteopathic medicine remains, perhaps, one of the world's best kept secrets. It's time to share our secret with society at large.

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Mandatory in-flight medical equipment earns high marks

In a 1980 editorial, "A plea to the airlines," (JAOA 1980;79:430) I urged airlines to have basic medical equipment kept on board for phy-

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