The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association

The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association (JAOA) encourages osteopathic physicians, faculty members and students at colleges of osteopathic medicine, and others within the health care professions to submit comments related to articles published in the JAOA and the mission of the osteopathic medical profession. The JAOA's editors are particularly interested in letters that discuss recently published original research.

Letters must be submitted online at <http://www.osteopathic.org/JAOASubmit> and not have been published elsewhere. All accepted letters to the editor are subject to editing and abridgment.

Value of Tenets of Osteopathic Medicine for Patients During COVID-19 Crisis

To the Editor:

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has affected how we educate students and deliver health-care. I argue COVID-19 presents opportunities for osteopathic physicians (DOs) and researchers to demonstrate that osteopathic medicine is an effective solution to improve the nation's health during this crisis, even when much of traditional osteopathic treatment is not available to patients because of the need for physical touch. The tenets of osteopathic medicine¹—that the body is a self-regulating unit and that structure and function are interrelated—are particularly important during this crisis for several reasons.

People are social distancing, patients with COVID-19 symptoms are self-isolating, individuals and families are unable to attend religious services, and physicians are using telemedicine to care for patients. These experiences negatively impact the mental and spiritual

health of our communities. DOs understand that the body is a unit,¹ and this is essential because patients' minds, bodies, and spirits are affected by COVID-19. DOs are trained to recognize this and treat the whole person.

DOs realize that structure relates to function and understand that patients' musculoskeletal structures are affected by their changing work environments, including teleworking.¹ A DO treats patients' structure with osteopathic manipulative medicine when possible, but also with exercise and stretching to improve function, resulting in better health outcomes that eliminate the risks associated with prescribing new medications. In contrast, a patient who is experiencing musculoskeletal issues and is not treated by a health care professional trained in the tenets of osteopathic medicine may be prescribed medication in place of manipulative medicine or lifestyle modifications. Treating both structure and function is particularly important for patients with risk factors like advanced age or comorbidities, because their bodies' are less able to effectively combat COVID-19.

DOs promote the body's inherent capacity for self-healing, self-maintenance,

and self-regulation. Leveraging the body's ability to self-heal will result in fewer people going to hospitals or doctors' offices for treatment, helping to limit the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the strain on hospitals. In this way, DOs can play an important role in limiting the spread of COVID-19. The osteopathic community should analyze electronic health records data to determine which patients benefit the most from the distinct care provided by DOs during COVID-19, including care provided through telemedicine. Furthermore, the profession needs to publicize data that demonstrates the beneficial impact DOs have on patients' health and the importance of following the tenets of osteopathic medicine during this crisis.

DOs can use the tenets of osteopathic medicine¹ to improve the nation's health and limit the spread of COVID-19 by providing a distinct type of health care that treats the whole patient and leverages the body's ability to self-heal. If a person is hospitalized, DOs can use these tenets and osteopathic manipulative medicine to manage various health issues.² DOs can demonstrate that they can effectively manage this health crisis by using the tenets of osteopathic medicine when they treat their patients. (doi:10.7556/jaoa.2020.106)

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References

1. Tenets of osteopathic medicine. American Osteopathic Association website. <https://osteopathic.org/about/leadership/aaa-governance-documents/tenets-of-osteopathic-medicine/>. Accessed June 3, 2020.
2. Levy VJ, Holt CH, Haskins AE. Osteopathic manipulative medicine consultations for hospitalized patients. *J Am Osteopath Assoc*. 2019;119(5):299-306.

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