

AMERICAN OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION

POSITION PAPER ON TEACHING OSTEOPATHIC PHILOSOPHY, OSTEOPATHIC MANIPULATIVE TREATMENT AND MANUAL MEDICINE

The American Osteopathic Association (AOA) recognizes the need to educate the general public and other members of the health care community concerning the principles and practices of osteopathic medicine. Because manual therapy is not solely the domain of the osteopathic profession, osteopathic physicians may be called upon to educate and/or train other health care providers. This paper will delineate the position of the AOA with regard to this issue.

Definitions

Manual therapy is a systematic hands-on procedure(s) or method(s) employed by a health care professional in providing therapeutic care for his or her patients consistent within his or her statutory scopes of practice.

Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment is a form of manual therapy taught to and used by licensed osteopathic physicians. It is the therapeutic application of guided forces by an osteopathic physician to improve physiologic function and/or support homeostasis (ref. "Glossary of Osteopathic Terminology")

General Policy

The AOA strongly supports the policy that does not restrict who may attend a continuing medical education program (CME) sponsored by an AOA-accredited Category 1 CME sponsor. The AOA also supports the position that distinctively osteopathic medical practices should be employed in healthcare delivery in the United States only by osteopathic physicians whose formal professional education and training provide the skills and basis for using such practices. Therefore, no CME program should purport to empower, or lead to the premise that the skills learned in the program will empower the participant to practice osteopathic medicine or osteopathic manipulation in any form unless the participant has completed formal osteopathic medical education and received a license to practice osteopathic medicine from an appropriate licensing board.

Teaching Osteopathic Philosophy

Members of the general public and members of the health care community may wish to be educated in the philosophy and principles of osteopathic medicine. This knowledge allows the general public to participate actively and knowledgeably in their choice of health care provider and consideration of treatment approaches. Non-osteopathic health care providers may use this knowledge to coordinate their care with that of osteopathic physicians or to refer patients in an appropriate manner.

Osteopathic philosophy should be disseminated freely via all appropriate media in an attempt to educate all persons about the unique care that osteopathic physicians can provide. The acquisition of and access to knowledge about the profession should not be impeded. Knowledge alone does not provide adequate training to perform the duties of an osteopathic physician. Consequently, persons who receive education in osteopathic philosophy without successfully completing osteopathic education at an accredited college of osteopathic medicine and approved postdoctoral training should not represent that they provide osteopathic medical services or otherwise promote themselves as an "osteopath," an "osteopathic physician," an "osteopathic practitioner," or as having received "osteopathic training."

Teaching of Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment

The practice of osteopathy/osteopathic medicine, by definition and by law, is limited to graduates of AOA-accredited colleges of osteopathic medicine who have received an appropriate license. Enrollment in a CME class or classes is not a substitute for completion of education and training in an accredited college of osteopathic medicine. Simply taking a course or courses in manual therapy does not provide the necessary training and skills to perform osteopathic manipulative treatment and/or practice osteopathic medicine. Therefore, it may be appropriate to demonstrate and explain osteopathic manipulative treatment to persons other than licensed osteopathic physicians in a CME program. However, it is inappropriate to teach the integration of OMT into the practices of individuals who are not licensed for the unlimited scope and practice of medicine or who are not students enrolled in accredited colleges of osteopathic medicine. As a precautionary measure, CME providers should include the following disclaimer in the course materials and promotional materials for the course: "Enrollment in a CME class or classes is not a substitute for completion of education and training in an accredited college of osteopathic medicine. Simply taking a course or courses does not provide the necessary training and skills to perform osteopathic manipulative treatment or practice osteopathic medicine. Individuals who complete this course should not represent themselves as an 'osteopathic physician,' 'osteopath,' 'osteopathic practitioner' as having received 'osteopathic training' or as 'qualified to perform osteopathic manipulative treatment' unless they are properly licensed to do so. Furthermore, depending on course goals and content, it may be appropriate to require that participants satisfy certain educational prerequisites."

Teaching of Manual Therapy

Osteopathic physicians may instruct other health professionals in manual therapy/techniques. This instruction may be for the purpose of assisting the osteopathic physician in providing care to his/her patients or for the purpose of continuing education in the other health care provider's profession.

When instructing other health professionals in the performance of manual therapy, the osteopathic physician should teach techniques within the scope of practice of the attendee. Persons other than licensed osteopathic physicians who receive education or training in manual therapy from osteopathic physicians shall not represent to the public that they offer osteopathic manipulative treatment services. Nor shall they promote themselves as an "osteopath," an "osteopathic practitioner," as having received "osteopathic training" or practicing "osteopathy" or "osteopathic medicine."

Approved by AOA House of Delegates July 20, 2002