

AAO Responds to Larry Nassar Abuse Case

Michael P. Rowane, DO, MS, FAAFP, FAAO
2017-18 AAO President

EDITORIAL

Like many of you, I have watched the coverage of the Larry Nassar abuse case with growing horror. Nassar molested patients and told them it was osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT). Every physician knows it wasn't. There was nothing medically accepted about his criminal acts. The crimes Nassar committed in the name of osteopathic medicine bore no resemblance to the techniques so many of us use every day to provide relief to patients.

Sadly, Nassar's notoriety may make it that much harder for us to convince the public of the legitimacy of osteopathic manipulative medicine (OMM) and OMT. It is incumbent on all of us to ensure Nassar's legacy is not the legacy to define OMM. We must be the voice to advocate for our patients and our profession. Talk to your family, your friends, your colleagues—even strangers on the internet—about what makes OMM/OMT a healthy and viable alternative to opioids and how OMT, practiced responsibly, can benefit patients in pain and improve outcomes in multiple clinical conditions.

It is imperative that we educate other health care professionals, the public and our profession on the benefits of OMM/OMT.

The AAO, under the leadership of 2016-17 President Laura E. Griffin, DO, FAAO, and the AAO Board of Governors, developed a position paper of the "Recommended Guidelines for Examination and Treatment of the Pelvis and Related Areas." The AAO submitted Resolution H-336 to the American Osteopathic Association's House of Delegates in July 2017 for consideration as "[Recommended Guidelines for Pelvic Examination and Treatment](#)." After much discussion in subcommittees with the AOA Board of Trustees and House of Delegates, the recommendation was for the resolution to return to the AAO for the document to be refined and resubmitted.

The subcommittee discussions became an opportunity for the AAO to clarify why this guideline was introduced as a resolution in response to some confusion. It was apparent that the different groups did not realize that until the AAO developed a position paper, there was no comprehensive document by an osteopathic organization that addressed the appropriate application of OMT in

In January 2018, former osteopathic physician Larry Nassar was sentenced to 40 to 175 years in prison for sex crimes. His hearing drew testimony from more than 150 young women who described how he had abused them.

The AAO emailed a message to all Academy members on Wednesday, January 31, 2018. This item first appeared in its entirety in the February 2018 issue of *AAO Member News*.

treating conditions of the pelvic region. The AAO is working with multiple osteopathic specialty colleges to have a position paper for the profession to approve by the AOA House of Delegates in July 2018.

Adding insult to injury, many of you are aware that there was an op-ed piece in the *Los Angeles Times* on January 26, 2018, by Virginia Heffernan that presented a negative view of the osteopathic profession. Ms. Heffernan recommended that the public view osteopathic physicians and those that utilize OMM/OMT as criminals. The osteopathic approach was deemed to represent quackery. All of this was due to the acts of one individual. The AOA is responding to this, but one letter has been sent to the *Los Angeles Times*' editor-in-chief by one of our respected members, Kristine M. Rivera, DO. Dr. Rivera was kind enough to allow us to share [her letter to Ms. Heffernan](#). Dr. Rivera's response to reckless reporting was done in the most accurate and eloquent fashion.

It is important to understand that the AAO was responding to the Nassar case in an appropriate time frame. The initial response had to be from the AOA to ensure a consistent message to denounce Nassar for the damage done to innocent girls and women. Below is a statement about the case that was emailed to all Academy members on Wednesday, January 31. It also was posted on the AAO's website and shared on social media. I encourage all Academy members to engage with the AAO on social media, liking, commenting

(continued on page 8)

(continued from page 7)

and sharing posts to spread the word about the benefits of osteopathic medicine in general and OMT in particular.

AAO Response Regarding Larry Nassar

Osteopathic physicians are trained to utilize osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT) in the care of their patients. OMT offers an effective and nonpharmacologic option to treat a wide range of conditions, from common musculoskeletal disorders, such as low back and neck pain, to improving outcomes for elderly hospitalized patients admitted for pneumonia. OMT is a valuable tool for the health and well-being of patients who receive it. In the midst of an opioid crisis, there is a need for additional nonpharmacological treatment methods such as OMT to assist patients suffering from acute and chronic pain.

It is disheartening when a valuable treatment option for patient care is not used in an appropriate manner. It is reprehensible that a predator hid behind the guise of OMT to prey on young girls and women. Mark Baker, DO, the president of the American Osteopathic Association, expressed the same emotion that many of us share after hearing the stories of abuse to over 150 female patients. These brave girls and women have publicly described in detail what should never happen to a patient under the trusted care of any health care provider.

The abuse perpetrated by Larry Nassar violates every acceptable practice of osteopathic physicians everywhere. Such actions were counter to the [Osteopathic Oath](#) every osteopathic physician is committed to:

I will be mindful always of my great responsibility to preserve the health and the life of my patients, to retain their confidence and respect both as a physician and a friend who will guard their secrets with scrupulous honor and fidelity, to perform faithfully my professional duties, to employ only those recognized methods of treatment consistent with good judgment and with my skill and ability, keeping in mind always nature's laws and the body's inherent capacity for recovery.

The egregious actions of one individual should not deter efforts to encourage the appropriate application of osteopathic concepts in the treatment of patients. Caring for patients is the greatest of privileges. We join Dr. Baker in honoring these victims by doing all we can to ensure OMT is provided to patients in need in the most appropriate and professional way possible, by continuing to educate the public on our proud profession and all it has to offer, and by ensuring that, collectively and individually, we are vigilant in safeguarding our patients.

In service,



Michael P. Rowane, DO, MS, FAAFP, FAAO
2017-18 AAO President