

Thomas L. Northup Lecture: Accepting the Death of Osteopathy: A New Beginning

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

My commentary on accepting the death of osteopathy is a difficult topic to follow, unless you have lived in the daily practice of traditional osteopathy. Traditional osteopathy is a term I use that means one is in a family practice setting, treating all types and ages of people with all types of diseases, using the perceptual skills of osteopathy. It means using one's hands as a primary therapeutic tool to find the health and therapeutic process in the patient. Traditional practice is living the precepts of osteopathy in oneself. It is the striving to learn from nature the laws of healing. It is the augmentation of an innate healing power within the patient. It is an act of devotion to a specific body of knowledge that is clinically safe, effective, and guided by reason perched upon the Mystery of the Divine.

My relationship with osteopathy has been the central axis of my professional and spiritual life. It is a limitless and beautiful truth. This lecture focuses upon accepting the death of osteopathy as an individual. It is not about the action to be taken by committees, groups, or institutions; it is about oneself, one's relationship to osteopathy, and deepening one's personal insight and sense of direction. It is a topic I have lived and have found very healing. Accepting the death of osteopathy opens the way to a newfound inspiration, which replaces an old pattern of grief. We all have lived in despair most of our professional lives, watching osteopathy be defiled, degraded, forgotten, and turned more and more into an allopathic clone. My goal today is not to degrade, but to state the facts that we all know are true. I am not speaking out of anger but out of love for the true spirit of osteopathy. I am also speaking out of a desire to see it living again in its fullness.

Osteopathy has died; what remains is only an empty skeleton of the dynamic gift we were once given. The essence of osteopathy has gone extinguished. Today we are relating to a ghost, codependently and neurotically fixated upon imitating allopathic medicine. Many believe this illusion to be an evolution for the profession. It is not evolution; it is cloning. It is completely irresponsible to the suffering individuals in this world to reduce their options for healing; osteopathy is an alternative method of practicing medicine. A MD who saw the necessity for a safer, more effective, more wholistic profession founded it. Osteopathy was a gift to humanity. It was help. We have allowed ourselves to fail in our responsibilities to our fellow man.

Thomas L. Northup, DO, was considered the founding father of the American Academy of Osteopathy.

To be named a Thomas L. Northup Lecturer, an individual must reflect the stature of Dr. Northup in fields such as education, research, clinical practice, professional management or allied categories of activity. The lecture is delivered during the Academy's program at the American Osteopathic Association's annual Osteopathic Medical Conference and Exposition.

James S. Jealous, DO, received the 1999 Thomas L. Northup Lecturer Award. His lecture has been reprinted from the Winter 1999 issue of the AAOJ edited to conform to the AAOJ's style guidelines

Dr. Jealous passed away on February 16, 2021.

My argument is not against allopathic methods, but for the richness of osteopathy. Osteopathy is gone; it has died. Today, many will point to osteopathic manipulative medicine (OMM) as osteopathy. However useful OMM is, it is not osteopathy! Osteopathic practice is for the treatment of all diseases, not just somatic dysfunction of the neuromusculoskeletal systems. OMM and the AAO are, in fact, the only campfires still burning upon the vigilant plains of waiting; waiting for a change that will free osteopathy and allow it to resurrect itself and serve humanity. Our schools do not teach osteopathy as a primary education. Many are ashamed of traditional principles. The few students who really want osteopathy (and who do not lie on their applications) spend their free time trying to find osteopathy, but it is gone. The majority of students ridicule these few for being osteopaths. Many faculty and professors trivialize their interest in osteopathy. The school administrations generally lack social integrity, because they do not understand they are not giving the general public the gift of osteopathy. The schools are teaching allopathic medicine. We do not need more allopathic doctors; we need the alternative of osteopathy. We owe it to humanity to be osteopaths, but who remembers how to do a full practice using osteopathic principles? Are there any teachers who remember the whole sense of living osteopathy? If I say osteopathy

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has died, perhaps I should define the character of osteopathy as I have learned it and perceived it in thirty years of practicing traditional osteopathy.

First, osteopathy is an alternative to orthodox medicine. This truth should be obvious; if it is not, it died. Osteopathy is about finding the "health" in the patient. This is a direct perceptual skill; it is not just the idea of making the person healthy. Finding the health in the patient is the learned art of directly perceiving something other than disease in the patient, a skill that therapeutically engages laws of healing not recognized by orthodox medicine. The gift of this wisdom is all but forgotten. It was part of the lifeblood of osteopathy and part of a challenge to us to be a truly unique profession.

Secondly, osteopathy awoke us to the role of the autonomic nervous system (ANS) in health and disease. This tremendous insight was profound. As science has matured, it has noticed the relationship of stress to disease. Today, most Americans are aware of the role of stress in upsetting the balance of health. Osteopathy, however, was way ahead of even today's common medical knowledge. It had the skill to directly interpret and influence autonomic activity using perceptual and palpatory skills. The level of awareness that can be developed in this regard is much greater than any scientific instrument. The capacity to sense, interpret, and interface with autonomic nervous system control and influence cellular trophicity with a clear awareness of specific changes is lost, it is gone from our teachings and the skill has died. How many patients coming into a family practice setting in the 1990s have diseases or symptoms that are the result of sympathetic overload? Perhaps 80 percent or more of disease is directly traceable to ANS imbalance. Where are the insights and tools to treat this epidemic? Drugs do not cure cause. We have failed in our responsibility to humanity by letting this truth die. Today, we worship only the ashes; the living osteopathy is gone. Osteopathy is about finding the "health" in the patient. This is a direct perceptual skill: it is not just the idea of making the person healthy. Finding the health in the patient is the learned art of directly perceiving something other than disease in the patient, a skill that therapeutically engages laws of healing not recognized by orthodox medicine.

Thirdly, osteopathy, when alive, taught us to have a sense of the whole patient, not by engaging the parts but by a direct sense of the whole. The whole is the least division of life. Are these just words, medical poetry, or has something been lost?

Osteopathy is a relationship between man, nature, and the Divine. Osteopathy professed a relationship with nature and God that had meaning. Osteopathy did not see nature as a child of science. It saw nature as a reflection of the great and loving wisdom of the creator.

This truth was not a religious cult, it was a fact of common sense. Man is not the creator of life, nor is he as smart as he would like to believe. This perspective that man, nature, and God are in a direct relationship creates a sense of balance in the physicians' degree of self-importance. Osteopathy by its very nature could mold the ego into a position of compassion; compassion being not empathy but the capacity to see the divine in one's patients. This principle places osteopathic thinking and practice in an unorthodox position.

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In order to be brief, I will explore only one more principle of practice and that is that osteopathy prevents disease. Understanding and helping the ANS to balance plays an important role in interrupting the momentum of involutionary patterns of living. Understanding diet, exercise, perception and the ANS are incredibly powerful tools in preventive medicine.

Realizing that osteopathy has died brings us as individuals to a point of fact where we must reconcile this loss. Dr. Elisabeth

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Kübler-Ross, an outstanding clinical researcher and practitioner, has written extensively on the subject of death and dying.¹ Her research reveals that in order to accept death one passes through several stages that finally lead to a completely new relationship with living. As osteopathic physicians, who have realized that osteopathy is dead, we have several choices. More importantly, we need to find freedom from the constant frustration that we face when realizing the fact that osteopathy cannot return and serve humanity unless there is a new beginning. A new beginning requires insight. It requires that we be free from our grief and accept death. This is not a morbid thought. It is a direction that perhaps will open us to new possibilities. Let us take a brief look at Dr. Ross' stages of acceptance and see what we can begin to understand.

Stage of Anger

The first stage is anger. One is angry at the facts. One is angry that one cannot control life. One yells. One is irritable. One lives on the edge of neuroses. We see this in ourselves as osteopaths. We see this anger in our communities, our teachers, our schools, and our students. As we feel the loss of osteopathy, individual egos fly into overload, and the community yells out, "Give us more osteopathy!" The war rages between knowing and loss. One is at war against the unresolved. The pain of the facts remains hidden in the turmoil of trying to escape the loss.

Stage of Denial

One says to oneself or to others, "No, no, it is not true, osteopathy is alive, it is not dead, I will fight for it. I will change the profession. Osteopathy cannot die, I will not let it, and it lives. I have seen it." One senses the remaining life. One finds a part of oneself not yet embraced by death. One has false hope for changing the fact but one lives with the reality of death. Denial is a heavy load. One begins to bend.

"One cannot accept not having a cure." For a physician, this is a difficult truth.

Stage of Bargaining

I find this stage the most interesting because the urge to survive overrides the essence of the individual. Bargaining is a form of begging. One asks the school for more time; less is ultimately given. The disease is accelerating; the patient is losing ground, they beg. I will do anything, I will change, I will act like a MD, and I will compromise myself. Please do not let this death happen. But it has happened. We worship the memory of another time, another day, when osteopathy lived through the heroic efforts of individual

DOs. Osteopathy has expired. There is no one to blame; there is no cause to be defined. Bargaining is only a symptom of the unaccepted, unrealized awareness that the unique gift of osteopathy to humanity has been hopelessly lost. The bargaining continues, but one becomes aware that nothing is gained. This leads to the next stage in the journey of accepting death.

Stage of Depression

In the stage of depression, one is apathetic, withdrawn, and gives up hoping. One has found no peace in compromise. Many DOs are apathetic and have lost interest in supporting the efforts of the AAO or other osteopathic groups. They have seen the futility of efforts to resuscitate osteopathy. They live in isolation from their profession, not because they do not practice osteopathy, but because they are unable to support the illusion that osteopathy is alive. I do not agree with this form of relationship, but I can sympathize with the integrity with which they meet this very serious and difficult question.

Depression is the last stage. It is the bottom of the abyss and it is in this emptiness feeling that one has nothing left.

In our individual practices, we have all seen terminally ill patients who struggle, agonize, and finally accept the fact of death. But, we have also seen something quite dramatic, something quite beautiful, that occurs when the patient accepts the loss and accepts the unknown. It is in this acceptance that one gains access to an entirely new world; a world that is full of freedom, continuity, and the expression of love. Our dying patients have taught us the greatest lesson of living, resolution, and problem solving. They have taught us that beyond all the chaos, fear, denial, bargaining, and apathy, there is another reality. It is from this reality that osteopathy was given to Dr. Still. It was a gift to mankind. An alternative method of healing. We cannot find it living in the places where we look, but it's spirit is alive. Perhaps waiting for a new opportunity to come into the world and help mankind. The answer to this question can only be encountered by those who have accepted the death of osteopathy, for those who have truly faced the loss, who truly have found the living spirit of osteopathy. This living spirit can speak only to individual hearts and only to a mind that is peaceful. A mind that is free from fear, free to listen, and free to follow the truths of traditional osteopathy. These questions must be pondered very deeply and without motive. One perhaps only needs to remember that osteopathy came to help and to serve mankind. Let us pray that it comes into a new life.

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I would like to end my commentary by reading you a story, an old story, reported by the author Laurens Van der Post in a small pamphlet entitled, *Patterns of Renewal*.² It was a story told to him by his nanny as he grew up in South Africa. I will give my own paraphrase of this meaningful tale. The story begins like this:

Once in the days of the early race, there was a man who captured a superb herd of cattle. The cattle were magnificently stippled black and white and he loved them very much. Every day he took the cattle out to graze and brought them home in the evenings. He put them in his thorn shelter each evening and milked them in the morning. One morning, he found that they had already been milked. Their udders, which had been sleek the night before, were wrinkled and dry. He thought, "Well, this is very extraordinary. I couldn't have looked after them very well yesterday." Therefore, that day he took them to better grazing. But again, the next morning, he found that they had been milked. That night, bringing them back after a good feed, he sat up to watch. About midnight, he saw a cord come down from the stars. Down this cord, hand over hand, came young women from the stars. He saw them with large buckets and baskets, creeping into the shelter and milking his cattle. He took up his stick and he ran for them. Immediately they scattered and ran for the cord. The young women went up as fast as they could. However, he managed to catch one of them by the leg and pull her back. She was the loveliest of them all, so he married her. Their life would have been happy but for one thing. She had with her a tightly woven basket with a lid that fit tightly into its neck.

She said to him, "There is only one thing I ask of you and that is, you will never look into this basket without my permission." He promised. Every day she went out to cultivate the fields as women did in those days and he went to look after the cattle and to hunt. This went on for some months, but gradually the sight of this basket in the corner began to really annoy him. One day, coming back for a drink of water in the middle of the day, when his wife was away in the fields, he saw the basket standing there and he said, "Well, really. This is too much. I am going to have a look into the basket." He pulled up the lid of the basket, looked inside, and began to laugh. In the evening, his wife came back and with one look at him she knew what had happened. She said, "You have looked in the basket didn't you." He said, "Yes, I have," and then added, "You silly, silly woman. The basket is empty." She said, "You saw nothing in the basket?" He replied, "No, nothing." Thereupon looking very sad, she turned her back on him and vanished into the sunset. The old nurse telling the story then said to the child listening, "You know, it did not matter so much his breaking his promise not to look in the basket. What was so awful was that looking in the basket, he saw nothing in it."

References

1. Kübler-Ross E. *The Wheel of Life: A Memoir of Living and Dying*. Scribner. 1997:277
2. Van der Post L. *Patterns of Renewal*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet Number 121. 1962:4-51. ■