

How can visceral manipulation help my massage clients?

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The roots of visceral manipulation began in Osteopathy under the guidance of Andrew Taylor Still, M.D., D.O., in the late 19th century.

Still had been trained as a medical doctor, but found that he could treat most diseases by palpating dysfunctional areas and treating them with his hands. Osteopathy means to “begin with the bones.” He discovered when he found an area where the bones were not properly aligned nor moving adequately, this area became the first guide for the practitioner in performing

treatment. This area reflected where the forces of life are not moving properly.

Still began with the bones, but did not end there. In his writings, he constantly talked about joints, fascia, blood supply, nerves, internal organs and lymph flow. Still’s ideas were very clear: All tissues need adequate fluid, as well as nutritional and neurological exchange, to be healthy.

The most current and largest curriculum of visceral manipulation is under the guidance of Jean-Pierre Barral, P.T., D.O., at The Barral Institute.

Barral is a French osteopath who became curious about the visceral system and its relationships to structure and function. Knowing the anatomy of the human body became key in understanding the mechanism of how the viscera affected postures, movement, pain and balance.

Visceral dysfunction is when fluids, nutrition and nerve conductivity are compromised. When the fascial attachments and supporting structures of the viscera are restricted, mobility (movement) and motility (inherent tissue motion pattern) will not function to provide for

homeostasis or balanced health. This visceral dysfunctional area will also have multiple parameters of restricted motion, thermal changes, perturbed fluid movement and associated neurological (spinal, sympathetic or parasympathetic) changes.

The massage therapist knows all too well about the multiple strains that are found in each of his or her clients.

The body generally accumulates many strains over a lifetime.

The strain takes a certain amount of force to hold it there, exerting tension into the fascia. The one with the most force will have the biggest effect on the fascia. This is also called tensegrity.

Treating the most important strain will have the largest effect on the body. Forces that accumulate in our body can remain in the superficial layers of our anatomy or they can penetrate into the deeper layers to

adversely affect the fascia of the organs, blood vessels or nerves.

If the primary strain is within these deeper tissues, the increased mechanical tension will compromise the fluid vessels (veins, retention of metabolic byproducts; lymph, relative edema; or arteries, decreased

hypertonicity is not resolving.

The visceral manipulation curriculum has evolved over the years as Jean-Pierre Barral has learned new strategies of treatment from anatomical relationships, case studies, his fellow colleagues and from each of us, his students.

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nutrition or oxygen) and the visceral-somatic relationship via the connective tissues and the autonomic nervous system.

If the client is making progress with your present program but seems to be at a plateau or the pattern keeps returning, you may want to consider how visceral manipulation can guide you to the deeper somatic cause of why the pain, inability to relax, breathing mechanism or muscle

There are six levels in the main curriculum of visceral manipulation. Each of these levels is either three or four days in length, and covers the anatomy, physiology, mobility and motility of each organ and the significant treatments for these organs.

The abdominal, pelvic, thoracic and cranial organs will be covered in the courses. The manual-thermal and viscera-emotional techniques will be covered in this curriculum as well. The listening evaluation procedure, which is a phenomenal technique for any manual therapist to know, is in its own separate category.

As you progress in the program and find you have an interest in the neurological, vascular or articular aspects of the main visceral program, you can proceed with these in your future studies.

If you are interested in learning more precision in your palpation skills, more precision with specific techniques and helping your clients recover with more precise results, visceral manipulation may be a perfect choice for you.

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