

## Osteopathic Methods and the Great Flu Pandemic of 1917-1918

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Dr. Patterson notes:

The great influenza pandemic of 1917-1918 has been legend in osteopathic lore. It killed almost 1.5 times as many people worldwide (10 million) in 6 months as did the entire World War I in more than 4 years (7.5 million). Some sources put the death toll of the pandemic at closer to 20 million.

“The osteopathic medical community treated patients with influenza and its more potent sequela, pneumonia, with various forms of manipulative treatment, rest, and hydration. After the death sweep had abated, the leaders of the profession surveyed osteopathic practitioners nationwide regarding their experiences with treatment.”

The results showed that patients treated by osteopathic physicians had a death rate of 0.5%, whereas medically treated patients had an average 6% death rate (up to 27% in Boston).

“Patients with pneumonia under osteopathic care had a death rate of less than 10%, as opposed to 33% of medically treated cases.”

“It is apparent that osteopathic methods were highly effective in the epidemic.”

Patterson quotes a 1919 study indicating that “people receiving routine osteopathic care seemed to have contracted that influenza at a much lower rate than did the untreated population.”

He discusses a 1937 article that indicated that drugs used to treat influenza, pneumonia, and other diseases by the medical profession were actually harmful to those receiving them. **[It is noteworthy that the same drugs and classes of drugs are being used today.]**

Lastly, he notes that “the best defense against disease and infection remains health. Optimal health is the result of the optimization of the function of each individual. Osteopathic care that includes intelligently applied manipulative treatment is an excellent preventative treatment.”

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Following this, the JAOA reprinted 4 articles from their archives.

Dr. Ward reviews the numbers seen in the previous studies, and adds:  
"A further illuminating feature of these reports reveal the fact that few persons contracted influenza who, just preceding and at that time of the epidemic, had been having more or less regular osteopathic manipulative treatment."

Dr. Warren notes that typical medical management with antipyretic drugs, including aspirin and acetaminophen **[precursors]** is harmful to the patient with influenza. He notes that: "The use of antipyretics becomes not only illogical but definitely detrimental to the welfare of the patient." He bases this on the concept that anti-inflammatory protocol shifts the white blood cell profile to leukopenia, while a shift to leucocytosis is clinically desirable.

"Since the epidemic of 1918-1919, when osteopathic treatment proved to be superior to drug therapy in this disease, thousands of cases have been taken care of by osteopathic physicians."

"Our attention should be directed to the cervical and upper thoracic regions and especially the upper rib articulations. Increased ventilation to the lungs should be sought by appropriate manipulation of the chest cage." **[This sounds much like many of my neuro diplomate friends.]**

"The osteopathic care of influenza definitely diminishes the course of the disease in point of time and severity. Thus the mortality from uncomplicated cases almost reaches the vanishing point."

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In 1996 I was the speaker at the South Dakota State Convention, in Bookings. During that convention I met an elderly Chiropractor who told me that his introduction to Chiropractic was doing house calls with his father, who was a Chiropractor before him. He told me that these house calls were specifically to treat people who were bedridden with infectious diseases, primarily pneumonia. He told me that his father had a reputation of having never lost a pneumonia patient. This was the pre-antibiotic era of health care.

Since I originally heard that story, I have repeated it many times. I repeated it in 2000 at the Iowa State Chiropractic convention in Des Moines. At that time another Chiropractor told me that Chiropractic was licensed in Iowa and Nebraska as a consequence of the observation that those under Chiropractic care were not dying during the 1917-1918 flu epidemic in anywhere near the same proportion as compared to those who were not under Chiropractic health care. This Chiropractor told me that this is a story that had been passed down to him through both his grandfather and father who were Chiropractors before him.