

Spotlight on ESM Therapies

THE FIRST IN A SERIES HIGHLIGHTING SPECIFIC HEALING MODALITIES WITHIN ESM

Ortho-Bionomy: The Homeopathy of Bodywork

BY LUANN OVERMYER

Ortho-Bionomy is a gentle, effective approach to somatic re-education that uses comfortable positioning and relaxing movements to unlock tension, relieve pain, promote structural balance, reduce stress and increase personal awareness and well-being. Ortho-Bionomy incorporates a wide spectrum of techniques ranging from hands-on contact to non-physical contact with the client's energy field to initiate innate, self-corrective reflexes that remind the body of its own natural ability to find balance.¹

In a typical session the client, clothed and without shoes, lies on a table and identifies any areas of discomfort; the practitioner slowly moves the client into positions of comfort that allow patterns of tension to release and to be replaced by a sense of well-being. Ortho-Bionomy addresses a remarkable number of painful and debilitating physical and emotional conditions; it is taught and recognized worldwide for its simple, gentle and lasting effectiveness.

Origin and History

The philosophical and scientific roots of Ortho-Bionomy lie in the field of Osteopathy. This 100-year old system of health care recognizes the self-healing, self-regulating capacity of the body, and seeks to facilitate and augment the basic curative force inherent in the body. Osteopathy has developed a system of treatment that

acknowledges the relationship of the physical structure of the body (both osseous and somatic) to the self-healing potential of the individual.²

A particular osteopathic treatment procedure, known as positional release, was developed by Lawrence Jones, an American osteopath. In 1964, Jones described in an article, "Spontaneous Release by Positioning," that pain and tension could be relieved in a few minutes by slowly and carefully exaggerating an abnormal posture so as to make the patient maximally comfortable. He found that muscle spasms that had been holding the bones in an abnormal position would spontaneously relax without a forceful manipulation.

Arthur Lincoln Pauls, a British osteopath, was inspired by Jones' work to dedicate himself to the principles of non-force corrective techniques. By 1976 Pauls had developed the Phased Reflex Techniques of Ortho-Bionomy. These techniques encompass positional release and energetic techniques that enable the client to understand, consciously experience and even participate in their own capacity to self-correct.

In Conventional Health Care

Ortho-Bionomy's primary benefits lie in helping people to break the cycle of pain, to correct structural and somatic dysfunction, and to release stress. This non-invasive, quick acting approach is an effective preparation



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Courtesy of North Atlantic Books

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for movement and therapeutic exercise. Ortho-Bionomy incorporates a re-education process that includes isometric and isotonic techniques, posture and gait training, awareness-based therapeutic exercise and positional release as part of the client's self-care program.

Ortho-Bionomy facilitates the therapeutic process. The body is always moved in the direction of comfort, allowing the client to relax and develop trust in the practitioner's hands and the therapeutic process. With Ortho-Bionomy the client experiences a greater sense of well being and ease from within, and learns to move toward comfort and away from pain. The client becomes physically and mentally attuned to inherent possibilities of change.

The key to the effectiveness of Ortho-Bionomy lies in the reflex activity and in the proprioceptive nervous system. This system generally works below normal waking consciousness, shaping posture and movement patterns by registering and adapting the body's subtlest responses to a lifetime of experience.

In Ortho-Bionomy, the slow movements, gentle positioning and slight compression stimulate the proprioceptors at a pace that allows the client the opportunity to be consciously present and attuned to the stored experience within these movement patterns. Proprioceptively, the client is offered alternative and more functional patterns. This respectful non-force approach affirms the natural wisdom of the body, offering the client possibilities for change.³

The techniques of Ortho-Bionomy educate the client to recognize which positions relieve pain or stress. Finding these optimum positions stimulates self-correction and interrupts the reflex arc that perpetuates the pain cycle. This is especially useful in chronic cases where the trauma pattern has been proprioceptively incorporated.

For example, take the case of a woman who suffers an injury that disturbs her normal, healthy structural pattern of movement.

She adapts to the trauma and develops compensation patterns somewhat more limiting, perhaps painful, yet still functional.

The practitioner, guided by the client's preferred posture and subtle movement, supports and follows the movement patterns inherent in the tissue. This allows the client to self-correct her own structural faults, while at the same time releasing any emotional and mental trauma that may have been generated by the injury and stored in the compensation posture.

Through the action of the proprioceptive system the client can release the trauma, resistance and pain, increase her range of motion, and learn to integrate more effectively her physical, emotional, and mental experiences.⁴

In effect, Ortho-Bionomy is compatible with any system of traditional medicine. These techniques have already been incorporated into a variety of health care settings: medical offices, physical therapy clinics, sports medicine clinics, outpatient chemotherapy clinics, HIV and AIDS clinics, dental and chiropractic offices. Ortho-Bionomy is currently being used by osteopaths, nurses, manual lymph drainage therapists, physical and occupational therapists, massage therapists, bodywork practitioners, counselors, psychotherapists and social workers.

In Allied Health Care Practices

Conventional allied health care benefits from integrating Ortho-Bionomy in several ways. The techniques work quickly to release pain and discomfort. The average position of release is only held for 20-60 seconds, yet the relief can be profound. The client becomes engaged in the therapeutic process, learning that pain is not endless, and that comfort is a realizable outcome. Health care practitioners find that once pain is relieved, patients can communicate more coherently about their symptoms and take a greater role in their healing process. Patient resistance to therapy is eliminated and recovery time can be reduced.

The work has been safely and extensively applied for a wide variety of orthopedic

conditions. Ortho-Bionomy has totally eliminated pain in post-surgical patients with bilateral hip replacements who could not tolerate any extrinsic movement. It is used to address the chronic and acute pain of scoliosis. Low back conditions and sciatica problems quickly resolve with the techniques and gentle exercise program of this work.

Physical therapists use Ortho-Bionomy positional release to relieve muscle pain and spasms, muscle imbalances, and increase range of motion. The techniques prepare the soft tissue and joints for mobilization, movement, therapeutic exercises, and more direct stretching and soft tissue work. Ortho-Bionomy is a useful adjunct to traditional physical therapy as it uses physiological principles that allow healing and release to come from within. Internal cues increase proprioceptive awareness to allow reintegration, realignment, and the release of habitual or compensated postural and movement holding patterns.

Ortho-Bionomy effectively treats sports injuries by stimulating natural neuromuscular reflexes to reduce swelling, decrease pain, increase range of motion, and enhance healing capacity.

In chiropractic clinics, Ortho-Bionomy balances muscle dystonia and dysfunctions, increases joint mobility and range of motions, and especially re-educates muscle spasm in preparation for joint mobilization and adjustment.

Ortho-Bionomy is highly effective in dealing with the side effects of cancer treatment. It alleviates discomfort secondary to surgical procedures including frozen shoulder and pain due to access port surgery. It also relieves nausea, lack of energy, and discomfort during chemo therapy sessions.

The hands-on component of physical touch helps the cancer patient to relax, to reintegrate a somatic sense of their bodies, and to alleviate fear. Patients appreciate the opportunity to engage and focus on their bodies within a wellness perspective that

encourages a sense of their natural healing capacity. Their somatic and emotional feelings are acknowledged in a safe and supportive manner.

Ortho-Bionomy allows cancer patients to slow down, experience and reintegrate their sense of themselves in a somatic way that focuses on wellness and quality of life. The work helps them to understand how stress and fear affect the body and to implement somatic techniques that empower them to alleviate their own pain and discomfort.

Orthopedic surgeons, neurologists, doctors, acupuncturists, nutritionists, psychologist, massage therapists and chiropractors all refer patients to independent practitioners of Ortho-Bionomy. These professionals find that a wide variety of physical and emotional conditions respond to Ortho-Bionomy's non-invasive techniques. The gentle approach allows for physical, mental, and emotional effects of trauma to be released effortlessly and re-alignment and reintegration to occur naturally.

REFERENCES

- 1 Society of Ortho-Bionomy, International®, P.O. Box 257899, Chicago, IL 60625-7899, (800) 743-4890, offers information on practitioner training programs, a newsletter with a schedule of classes throughout the United States, Canada and Europe, and sells a directory listing Registered Practitioners and Instructors by state and country. Recommended reading: *Ortho-Bionomy, A Manual of Practice*, Kathy L. Kain with Jim Berns, is available from North Atlantic Books, P.O. Box 12327, Berkeley, CA 94712.

NOTES

- 1 Overmyer, Luann. Ortho-Bionomy. In *Bodywork in America*, edited by George Quasha, in press.
- 2 Chaitow, Leon. *Osteopathy*. Northamptonshire: Thorsons Publishers Limited, 1982, pp.13-17.
- 3 Overmyer, *ibid*.
- 4 *ibid*



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