

The Diagnosis of sports injuries – the ‘obvious’ should never be considered enough!!

It's a fundamental part of the Osteopathic approach that an Osteopath addresses the nerve supply and blood supply to an area of pain, as well as what's happening to the area itself.

This sounds quite logical. But it can be difficult, for example, for a young footballer that's 'twisted' his ankle to understand that his pain will greatly benefit if his treatment includes improving the function of his diaphragm and calf muscles. However, once it's been explained how such an approach can assist the supply and drainage of blood to the ankle and therefore assist the healing process itself, he'll understand it and, more often than not, be keen to see this 'new' approach used as soon as possible.

Good medical care is usually 'logical' in this way!

However it also requires the therapist to think laterally in order to see 'beyond the obvious'. That's also why an individual who describes what sounds like a confusing and illogical set of symptoms may, on reflection, have provided some excellent insights into a problem that isn't common, but is entirely treatable.

As an example, a patient attended the Woodside Clinic with severe low backache that he developed whenever he went to work. It seemed quite straightforward and his pain related to the fact that his job involved him sitting at his desk at a computer all day. Examinations revealed a deep curve in his back and some restricted areas in his spine. However, what proved especially significant was that he was doing 50 sit-ups each morning and these were completely the wrong exercise for his particular back problem! He hadn't mentioned it initially because he assumed that they could only help! So although the treatment – getting him to alter his work position, prescribing specific exercises and changing the position of his car seat would have helped, it wouldn't have helped as much or as quickly if he'd kept on exercising in the wrong way!

Those who are keen on their sport, are especially appropriate for this more sophisticated approach. The most important thing in their lives is the ability to function at optimum health and fitness. Treating a painful 'hamstring' purely on a local level can, quite often, result in reoccurrences that, unless the underlying 'causes' of the problem are addressed (eg. a 'twisted knee', poor foot mechanics, poorly functioning nerve supply to the muscle etc) will in all probability lead to a long-term non-resolving complaint.

A good medical team will occasionally get together to discuss cases and to develop a unified 'best practice' approach. Increasingly private clinics are also seeing the value of such 'teamwork'. Another example from Woodside Clinic might serve to help.

A professional footballer visited the clinic with a low back problem. He'd suffered a fracture of his tibia and fibula (shin bones) at the age of nine and this had resulted in legs of slightly uneven length (resulting in a compensating tilt in his low back, a weakness and inevitable injury). He'd also altered the way he used his right foot (trying to make up for that leg being shorter) putting a strain on the ankle (making it more vulnerable to injury).

One of the Osteopaths provided him with a core stability regime (to 'stabilise' his pelvic), treated his back, corrected his (entirely inappropriate) stretch routine and improved the movement in his knees and hips. He was also given an exercise regime, some 'global' strengthening exercises and ultrasound from one of the clinic's physiotherapists and an orthotic (foot insole) was prescribed by the podiatrist (helping his ankle/foot stability and leg length)

As a result of treating him in this way he not only got better but, according to the player himself, he also felt 'more flexible and stronger than ever'.

What does this all demonstrate? Simply that, like many things in life, seeing the whole picture can sometimes reveal things you might miss completely at first glance! That's why, quite often the patients who've had problems that 'just won't get better' can be the most rewarding to treat. They provide us with a great deal of detail about the experience of living with their problems and by listening to everything they have to say and examining them, all that information can be considered, assessed and analysed.

The hypothesis is continually 'fine tuned' during treatment and, of course, exercises are prescribed. As it becomes evident that the correct diagnosis appears to have been reached, seeing such patients get better is all the more satisfying, because the patients know that without their own input (providing detailed information and doing their exercises!) they probably wouldn't not have got better!

It's what the Americans call empowerment!

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