



Vanessa's Story

Craniosacral Therapy and Physical Therapy A Personal Perspective from a Skeptical Mind



Vanessa Cayle, MSPT has been a physical therapist since 1994. She is a Certified Instructor in Frequency Specific Microcurrent and an instructor of CST. She teaches and presents both locally and nationally. She is the owner and director of the CranioSacral Institute of MI, LLC.

A typical story:

At 30 years of age, with a 15 year history of low back pain, I faced severe neck problems affecting my ability to use my arms. I was not able to pick up my infant son. Being a physical therapist, I “knew” how to treat these conditions; for years I had been “keeping my symptoms at bay”. However, facing long term nerve damage to my sciatic nerve, while losing both sensation and strength in my arms; I knew I needed to take a more aggressive approach. Using stretching, regular exercise and medication once allowed me to continue my life. However, it was only masking my underlying spine problems that got me to this point. X-rays confirmed a scoliosis that was at the time considered “untreatable” by the methods in which I was trained. Despite my skepticism, I needed to expand my horizons to find other approaches to my condition.

Looking for an answer:

I was first exposed to craniosacral therapy through another physical therapist that had been using the techniques on children. Craniosacral therapy was considered “alternative” by most physical therapists. However, her results were so impressive, I began to seek out the therapy to add to my own current physical therapy program. Despite extensive of research, I was not able to find a clinician in this area. I decided to take a class. While in the class, I was able to be connected with an experienced practitioner. The therapy she provided for me was the turning point of my health. Incredibly, a year later all my nerve and spine pain and symptoms were completely resolved. My scoliosis, which was the primary source of my problems, was nearly gone. I was medication free for the first time in over ten years.

Why it worked:

I later learned, through extensive training, that craniosacral therapy is highly effective in helping spine (neck, low back or thoracic) pain.

We often think of the boney part of the spine as the problem area with these conditions. A closer look at the anatomy points to another possible culprit. The boney spine houses and protects the spinal cord. The spinal cord is the very critical nerve communicator...the connection of the brain to rest of our body. Around the spinal cord is the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). The job of the CSF is to provide nutrients and to take away waste products from the spinal cord and brain. This CSF is contained around the spinal cord by a tissue called the dura mater. In the spine we call it the dural tube, as it is a tube around the spinal cord. If a “kink” or restriction occurs in the dural tube it can cause the boney spine to “kink” as well. Craniosacral therapy offers techniques that focus on gently releasing these “kinks”. After the opportunity to work on hundreds of spines with this condition, there is nearly always a reduction in pain, improved nerve symptoms and always an improved ability to move the spine (range of motion). An additional technique that employs this same philosophy is Sacro-Occipital Technique (SOT) and is utilized mostly by chiropractors to achieve the same outcome.

How to find it:

Fortunately, there are now many more practioners of craniosacral therapy than 8 years ago when I was searching for it. Practitioners may be physical therapists, occupational therapists, nurses, chiropractors, physicians or massage therapists. I recommend finding the type of practitioner that best fits your complaints. Craniosacral therapy is now payable as a part of physical and occupational therapy programs. This means that it may be covered by your health insurance as part of a complete therapy program. Chiropractic coverage may also allow for insurance coverage. Check with your therapist or chiropractor for more information specifically about your condition and insurance. A website lists all practitioners trained in Upledger curriculum at www.iahp.com. While this is not the only curriculum, it is the most extensive database of practitioners. There is also more information at the website www.craniosacralinstitute.com.

Vanessa Cayle, MSPT is a physical therapist with 14 years experience in hospitals, outpatient and school settings. She is a certified presenter of craniosacral therapy by Upledger Institute and teaches classes at the CranioSacral Institute of MI in Shelby Twp. She is the owner and director of the CranioSacral Institute of MI, LLC.

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