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Gentle touch provides health benefits Vestal woman offers craniosacral therapy to patients

On the long list of alternative, if controversial, therapies is one that's less well-known than many others.

But Pat Collins of Vestal is not only a believer in craniosacral therapy; she's a practitioner of it.

She was a computer geek, she says -- a computer analyst at Universal Instruments -- but when she was laid off in 2001, she took the opportunity to launch her life in a new direction.

She became convinced of the efficacy of the gentle, hands-on therapy by watching the unfolding recovery of a man who had received hundreds of pounds of blunt-force trauma to his head, which left him reeling with headaches for years.

After three treatments, with the practitioner's palms and fingertips barely exerting any force on his body, he was relieved of the longstanding headaches.

She has seen similar success with colicky babies whose distress stemmed from unseen injury during childbirth, she says. She became a massage therapist five years ago, then took additional courses in craniosacral therapy. She practices out of an office on Harry L Drive in Johnson City.

Craniosacral therapy was born through a startling observation on the part of an osteopath in 1970. Dr. John E. Upledger noted rhythmic movement of what would later be called the craniosacral system. At the time, no medical texts or experts could explain what he was seeing.

"His curiosity piqued, Upledger began searching for the answer," explains www.upledger.com, online home of the Upledger Institute. "He started with the research of Dr. William Sutherland, the father of cranial osteopathy ... Sutherland had explored the concept that the bones of the skull were structured to allow for movement. ... Upledger believed that if Sutherland's theory of cranial movement was in fact true, this would help explain, and make feasible, the existence of the rhythm he had encountered."

Beginning in 1975, Upledger served at Michigan State University as professor of biomechanics and clinical researcher, where he supervised anatomists, physiologists, biophysicists and bioengineers. "The results not only confirmed Sutherland's theory, but led to clarification of the mechanisms behind this motion -- the craniosacral system," the site says.

It has been used as an adjunct therapy in individuals with chronic neck and back pain, post-traumatic stress disorder, learning disabilities, even autism, Collins says.

Effective therapy comes from reestablishing the proper position and flow within that system, Collins explains. She and other practitioners use the sensitivity of their trained fingertips to feel the pulsing of the cerebrospinal fluid, thus detecting imbalances and uncorking stuck places to facilitate healing.

"It's definitely in the hands," she says. "You feel a gentle rocking between the sacrum and the base of the skull."

But forget all that, says Pam Moulton of Afton. She's no doctor or alternative-modalities expert, and she doesn't pretend to understand how or why it worked so well on her disabled son, Eddie Holewa -- but she swears it did.



Pat Collins of Vestal is a practitioner of craniosacral therapy as taught by the Upledger Institute in Palm Beach. Here she administers to quadriplegic Eddie Holewa of Afton in her Johnson City office.

VALERIE ZEHL / Press & Sun-Bulletin

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Log on to www.upledger.com for more information on craniosacral therapy; call 765-5624 to contact Pat Collins.

She took Eddie to Palm Beach, where they stayed for a week of intensive therapy at the Upledger Institute last year.

"The third day into it, we noticed changes," she says. The therapy had elongated by more than an inch the spine of her son, who has severe scoliosis, she says.

Now they make the trip to visit Collins weekly.



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