



Osteopathy - complex reasoning in the service of manual medicine

Context and background

Osteopathy, also known as osteopathic medicine (World Health Organization, 2010) (Osteopathic International Alliance, 2020) is a healthcare profession in France under the terms of European legislation (Sterlingot, 2024), and has been fully regulated since 2007. The profession is predominantly practiced by osteopaths on an exclusive license as well as by osteopaths who are also physicians or physiotherapists.

Registration to practice osteopathy is given by regional health authorities to holders of a diploma obtained from an osteopathic education provider approved by the Minister of Health, following a 5-year course of 4,860 hours' training. Some healthcare practitioners may benefit from a partial exemption from training requirements.

26% of French citizens see an osteopath every year, and 53% over a 5-year period (Odoxa for UPO, 2024) ranking this profession in France as the second or third healthcare profession in terms of public exposure. Since 2019, the year of the previous survey, French osteopaths have attracted 3.5 million new patients (Odoxa for UPO, 2019) ,

Patients go to osteopaths on their own, making osteopathy an independent therapeutic discipline (Agathe Wagner, 2023). However, two-thirds of their patients come on the recommendation of a healthcare practitioner (notably a doctor, physiotherapist or midwife) (Odoxa for UPO, 2024).

A profession with a strong identity in France

The regulations that apply to osteopathic medicine in France (Ministry of Health, 2015) reflect a contemporary vision of its historical roots (Rogers, 2002) (L'Hermite, 2024).

Osteopathy is a distinct medicine which, in addition to the bodily dimensions of patients, considers their psychological, emotional and social context. This approach is shared by most modern therapeutic disciplines.

Osteopathy aims to diagnose, prevent and treat functional disorders in patients (French Ministry of Health, 2007). It includes accurate palpation of all body tissues. This palpation may reveal somatic dysfunctions, which are characterized by alterations in the mobility, viscoelasticity or texture of the components of the somatic system; these may or may not be associated with painful sensitivity (Ministry of Health, 2015) (Giusti, 2017) (Lorenzo Arcuri, 2022) (Jacson Nesi R. L., 2024) (Jacson Nesi M. B.,) .

In diagnosing, preventing and treating patients, osteopaths use complex or systemic cognitive processes (Ministry of Health, 2015) (Morin, La complexité humaine, 1994) (Le Moigne, 1999) (Varela, 1989-1996) (Lazlo, 2002) (Benkirane, 2002) (Atlan, 2011); these

processes combine the connective¹, third-party², incompleteness and uncertainty principles³.

Osteopaths thus seek to identify and hierarchize somatic dysfunctions, environmental, social and psychic factors, as well as their interactions, in order to tailor the most appropriate osteopathic treatment to improve the individuals' state of health in their singularity (Tessier-Cazeneuve, 2018) (Nesi, 2024) (Morin, 1990).

Osteopaths use osteopathic manipulative treatments on all patient tissues (L'Hermitte, 2020) to enable them to recover improved health. They combine such treatments with therapeutic education and nutritional, physical and psychological hygiene (Steel A, 2019) (Amie Steel, 2017) (Vaughan, 2023).

Osteopathic teaching and practice are based on the best available evidence, the patient's expectations and the practitioner's clinical experience.

¹ Principle according to which interactions between the parts of a system can modify the properties of each of them. Principle according to which interactions between the elements of a system can modify the properties of each of them and/or lead to the emergence of new properties for the system as a whole.

² Principle according to which the observer can influence the phenomenon he observes

³ Principle according to which the complexity and extent of a system do not allow the observer to apprehend all its dimensions or to predict its evolution with certainty.

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