



# Is there a difference between a DO and an MD?

by Robert Dow, DO

If you are like most people, you have seen at least one doctor if not many for various medical concerns. What you may not know is that there are two groups of fully qualified medical doctors capable of providing the full scope of medical practice, MDs and DOs.

Over 100 years ago, a physician by the name of Andrew Taylor Still, MD, became dissatisfied with the current state of medicine and developed an alternative form of medicine called Osteopathic Medicine. In the late 1800's, Dr. Still felt that there should be a better approach to medical treatment. He developed a system of medical treatment focusing on the adjustment of the musculoskeletal system and improvement of circulation that provided a change from the treatments of that time that often seemed to cause more harm than good.

Over time, the Osteopathic Profession has changed and grown. With development of newer Osteopathic Techniques and a recognition of the place of medication and surgery, DOs are currently able to provide the a complete scope of medical care including diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions with a combination of Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment (OMT), medications and surgery when appropriate.

Although the focus from disease to patient centered care has blended MDs and DOs, OMT still remains an important difference. I feel it is safe to say that both MDs and DOs today generally provide a patient-centered approach to medicine. There are many similarities:

## Both DOs and MDs:

- Usually complete 4 years of College followed by 4 years of Osteopathic (DO) or Allopathic (MD) Medical School. (There are several schools that offer a combined 7 year program.)
- Complete an Internship/Residency for at least 3 years depending on the specialty of choice.
- Take similar or identical Board Exams for their specialty.

- Are required to hold a medical license to practice medicine.
- Are represented in all medical and surgical fields.

## So what's the difference?

Despite the similarities, there are some differences:

- DOs represent about 6% of the physician population. Although there are DO's in all fields and specialties of medicine such as neurosurgery, neurology, cardiology and ophthalmology, 65% of DOs specialize in primary care (Internal Medicine, Family Medicine, Pediatrics and OB/Gyn).
- DO's are trained to use Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine (OMT). Some MDs with additional training have incorporated this into their practice as well.

## What is OMT?

OMT (Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment) is a hands-on approach to diagnosis and treatment of many medical conditions. It can help to improve/restore normal function to the body and is designed to improve blood flow to body tissues. There are many different techniques used by DOs to accomplish this. Most involve working with the muscles, bones and other tissues of the body in various ways to improve function and can involve any area of the body. There are a variety of methods used to accomplish the goals of finding health. Most people find the treatments very relaxing.

## Who can benefit from OMT?

Many conditions can benefit from OMT. The most obvious are muscular complaints such as back pain. Surprisingly, there are many other conditions that can be improved as well. Some of these include: tension headaches and migraines, recurrent infections both viral and bacterial such as sinus and ear infections, TMJ, COPD and asthma.

## OMT for children:

This is where I focus my attention. I have found treating

children with OMT very rewarding. Treating early can prevent complications in certain conditions and the benefits can last a lifetime. The conditions in children that I find can benefit most from OMT are:

- Tension headaches
- Autism
- ADD (especially with hyperactivity)
- Behavioral issues
- Anxiety
- Scoliosis
- Bedwetting
- Asthma
- Sleep issues
- Colic
- Torticollis
- Back pain

Please note that this is not meant to assume that these conditions can be cured with OMT but we may be able to improve the situation with fewer or no medications in some situations.

### **What else should I know?**

Although all DOs are trained in OMT, some do not use this skill and some do not use anything but this skill. Be sure to ask first. Also, some MDs have had training in these treatments as well and may be able to use them. Referrals to DOs are also possible and in most cases, these treatments are covered by insurance.

Although difficult to conduct, there are current research projects going on in OMT including a large study at the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine in Maine to try to demonstrate whether there is a statistical effect on repeated ear infection in children treated with OMT.

In New Hampshire, there are currently over 200 DOs. In the Manchester area there are DOs represented in several fields including: Family Practice, Internal Medicine, Emergency Medicine, General Surgery, Nephrology (Kidneys), Hospital Medicine including Intensive Care Medicine and Pediatrics.

Feel free to explore the official American Osteopathic Medicine Website at [www.osteopathic.org/](http://www.osteopathic.org/).

