Gentle therapy can ease variety of body ailments

A gentle, but powerful, hands-on technique called craniosacral therapy is being used to treat chronic pain, balance disturbances, eye difficulties and other health problems.

St. Joseph's Community Hospital of West Bend offers craniosacral therapy through its massage therapy department and craniosacral therapist Kathleen Aragon. Aragon, who lives in West Bend, is a registered occupational therapist who works at the Mayville school system. She discovered the benefits of craniosacral therapy a number of years ago when she went through several sessions herself.

"I found it to be a real benefit to me. My body feels more aligned and I feel healthier," said Aragon, who studied through the John Upledger Institute to learn and practice the technique.

In her work at St. Joseph's, Aragon performs craniosacral therapy to treat chronic pain and conditions such as arthritis, fibromyalgia, headaches, TMJ/jaw pain, dysfuction, and whiplash. Working with special education students in the school, she has found it helpful to some children with learning disabilities or autism.

Craniosacral therapy is a light touch to the bones and membranes of the head, spine, and entire body as a way to encourage the release of pain and relaxation of connective tissues. The therapist's hands detect motion in cerebrospinal fluid and imbalances in the craniosacral system. They work to improve neurological communication by releasing the spinal fluid to a balanced flow.

Craniosacral fluid, which surrounds the brain and spinal cord, is held in place by an outer layer of membranes called the dura mater. As the fluid flows around the brain and down the spinal column it has a rhythm, just as blood flow has a rhythm. The therapist learns to detect and treat this rhythm, Aragon explained.

What's a craniosacral therapy session like?

"The person lies on a table on their back. You keep all your clothes on, with the exception of shoes. Earplugs, glasses and belts are removed. It's better to wear loose-fitting clothes. I usually start at the feet and begin to feel for the craniosacral rhythm. I then work along the body with one hand on each side of the body, forward and back," Aragon said.

"As I work, I can feel the tissues soften and release." She uses light pressure, working through the clothes. Working up the body and then on different places on the head, the therapist is able to sense the membranes and get the fluid to flow more freely.

"The pressure is very soft," Aragon said. "The amount of pressure is five grams - it's like holding a nickel in your hands."

What is the experience like?

"An overall sense of well-being," said Aragon. "And sometimes the feeling can be emotional too, because we have memories in our tissues. If an area has been restricted, you may feel like crying."

While the process is often deeply relaxing, after a treatment there may be some soreness as tight tissues begin to loosen. Aragon said craniosacral therapy is a very individual treatment and may not be for everyone.

"I am not healing the body but rather facilitating the healing within the body; so the number of sessions needed to help depends on the problems and how the body is processing the work. Some problems are more deeply entrenched in the system," said Aragon.

She said she enjoys the satisfaction the work brings to her and for those she sees "It really ups my lifting for me. It feels good to be doing this work."

More information about craniosacral therapy and scheduling a therapy session is available by calling St. Joseph's Community Hospital's massage therapy department at 334-3535.