ASTON-PATTERNING FOR
CHRONIC AND ACUTE PAIN

SPECIAL TO NURSE’S TOUCH BY MARCIA MICHAEL, RN

Along with my private practice, I work with a pain management clinic in Long Beach, CA. This physician-directed program employs a variety of modalities including allopathic medicine, biofeedback, acupuncture and psychological counseling. I use Aston-Patterning exclusively as I have found it to be particularly effective in helping patients with chronic and acute pain. The therapy itself does not create discomfort, which is especially important to people in pain.

Aston-Patterning was developed by Judith Aston, a nationally recognized authority in movement education, bodywork and ergonomics. I met her 27 years ago when I was a dancer. Recognizing her extraordinary ability to teach, I began to study with her in 1975.

Aston-Patterning considers the body an interconnected unit that must be treated in its entirety. Aston’s techniques include analyzing the body in movement and developing skills to teach clients movement lessons such as gait training, sitting, standing, reaching and bending, as well as specialized activities athletics.

Through my study of Aston’s work, I see the body’s asymmetry and teach the individual to negotiate these asymmetries more comfortably and efficiently in its activities of daily living. I use palpation and manipulative skills unique to Aston’s system, to identify and address the tension and holding patterns in the tissues. I also provide the client with specific exercises and ergonomic consultation that reflect Aston concepts to maintain physical improvements. For myself, I now use my body more efficiently and sustain my own physical stamina by using the biomechanical concepts of Aston-Patterning.

Aston, who holds a master’s degree in dance, developed her techniques through years of teaching experience with actors, athletes, physical education students, musicians, Rolffing patients and people with neuro-musculoskeletal problems. She teaches healthcare professionals workshops called Aston Movement.

In my first appointment with a new client, I explain that he or she will be an active participant in the sessions. I evaluate the client, observing and recording how his or her body parts relate to one another standing and while in motion. Then, I palpate the body to find out what parts are under-working, overworking or have lost the ability to respond. Clients usually leave their first session with a sense that they can be helped. Also, they feel empowered because they will be participating in the sessions to help themselves. My role is more of a facilitator or teacher than a therapist.

One of my clients over the past two and a half years was a hairdresser injured in a motor vehicle accident. For six years, she suffered from chronic pain because other treatments had failed to provide lasting relief. Not only were we successful in alleviating her pain, but she was particularly pleased that she had learned ways to accomplish her daily activities without placing additional strain on her back. This dynamic educational component of Aston-Patterning is also very effective for the conditions we see in the clinic such as myofascial pain syndrome, chronic headache, TMJ and postsurgical patients.

(Marcia Michael, RN, is a certified massage technician who holds a bachelor’s degree in dance and psychology. A registered nurse, she has worked with high-risk mothers in a hospital delivery department before opening her private practice.

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