

Brief Description of the Craniosacral System and its History

By Thomas Rasmussen, PhD, MSc, CST-D

The craniosacral system is a universal system described in many forms by different cultures at different times. In our modern times this universal system, the craniosacral system is described by including the science of anatomy and physiology of today. The main components of the craniosacral system are the tissues and fluids at the core of the human body. An important function of this system is the production, circulation, and reabsorption of Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF). CSF is produced within the craniosacral system and maintains the physiological environment in which the brain and nervous system develop, live, and function.

The human being functions as a whole and the craniosacral system function is in close relation to all systems of the body/mind/spirit. Central to the craniosacral system is a rhythmic motion expressed in all parts of the body, a rhythm not only found in vertebrate species, but introduced early in evolution of the animal kingdom.

Investigation in cranial field was begun in the second decade of the twentieth century by William G. Sutherland, DO. Dr. Sutherland was influenced by his teacher, Dr. Andrew T. Still and probably by the renaissance scientist Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Swedenborg was studying the brain as a gland that contains and separates the vital fluid, and as a connection between the body and soul. Dr. Still is the founder of Osteopathy; founding Kirksville Osteopathic College in 1892. Key concepts of Dr. Still's influence on Osteopathy and current-day CranioSacral Therapy. Dr. Still's concepts as identified by Dr. Upledger are:

1. The body functions as a dynamic unit.
2. Structure and function are interrelated.
3. The body has a self-regulating system which tends towards homeostasis.

Areas of aberrant cranial bone motion were induced and corrected by manual techniques. Soon therapeutic techniques were devised to correct abnormal cranial bone motion.

Early exploration of cranial manipulation was performed primarily by osteopaths and chiropractors who formed societies to investigate and teach cranial methods. These pioneers were at odds with the larger medical community, over one central aspect of the cranial system: the movement of the cranial bones. The many years of the right and wrong in the open or close suture controversy, have moved into a new era, where anatomy and morphology is studied with high-resolution modern scanners, and the use of cellular and molecular biology, advancing our understanding of sutures.

CST as it relates to the CNS and its related systems in the human body is central to our health. Modern research on human health and thereby the CNS and related system, is today taking place at a speed that was difficult to imagine even 10 years ago. As science advances on areas like biorhythms, CSF and sutures, we often get new understanding of how CST work.