

Ben Katz did an inservice at the VA hospital in Martinez, California for a group of doctors and PTs that treat Veterans. Below is an article from one of the doctor's blog with whom Ben did a mini treatment at the inservice.

Wednesday, July 1, 2009

The Body Mystical

I detached my hospital name tag from my shirt, unclipped my pen from my pocket, undid my belt and stepped out of my loafers. I stood in my socks, with my feet about hip distance apart and faced the curious onlookers. "Just close your eyes," he said, and placed his hand ever so lightly on my scalp. I knew it was not the weight of his hand, yet I felt an incredible heaviness in my being. My chest felt constricted, my breath shallow, and I felt myself sinking into the floor.

This was my first experience with Visceral Manipulation, and the practitioner was here to demonstrate his art in the context of our Traumatic Brain Injury Unit. As he explained it, VM is a system of manipulation developed by Jean-Pierre Barral, D.O. It stems from the idea that all our organs and tissues are supposed to have some relative mobility: a restriction in movement in any part of the body necessarily affects the body as a whole. He provided the following example: to raise one's arm above one's head, the liver must move ever so slightly. A tiny restriction in the liver's ligamentous attachments or capsule results in a much larger hindrance in upper extremity movement due to a fulcrum effect.

The VM practitioner begins by "listening" - not audibly to the patient's story but rather to what the body has to offer to the provider's inquiring touch. "The body offers the truest information," he said. Through a sequential probing of tissues and organs, the provider is able to assess where the problem is. Then, through manipulation, the blockage is released.

My body had - correctly - revealed a blockage in rib movement overlying my heart, due perhaps to scarring following my latissimus muscle bleed six months ago. After mere seconds of manipulation, my rib expansion was noticeably freer.

As someone trained in conventional Western Medicine, I find these "fringe" modalities fascinating. I approached them with skepticism, but my first-hand experiences have piqued my curiosity. I have come to the following conclusions: Medicine is a lot like Religion - there are many paths all searching for a single Truth. There are many ways to interrogate the body to discern what ails it, and perhaps no one system is superior than another. Modalities like VM may not have been subjected to the Western standards of double blind, randomized, controlled clinical testing but that does not mean they are less plausible or efficacious. Most importantly, like Faith, it is hard to articulate what transpires in a modality like VM unless it is experienced first-hand.

Both physician subjects - a psychiatrist and myself - knew that we had felt something during the listening and treatment, but it was elusive and intangible to the audience.

One of the nurse practitioners summed it nicely when she said, "This guy's either a lunatic or a genius."

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