In hope that DOs find uniqueness within themselves

To the Editor:
I enjoyed the February issue of JAOA with its mix of commentaries and research contributions. The debate over the uniqueness of and unity within the osteopathic medical profession seems to dominate our journals lately. Some practitioners within the profession (one claims them to be the "silent majority") believe that aside from manipulation, there is no real difference between osteopathic physicians and their allopathic counterparts. Others argue to the contrary but fail to define the distinctions in a meaningful way. The plea these days seems to be for a consensus and a clear definition of our differences for fear of our profession's otherwise slide into oblivion. Although I believe that manipulation itself is an important difference between us and allopathic physicians, I also know that osteopathic medicine is so much more. Why don't more osteopathic physicians know this?

As a medical student, I spent 2 years in the osteopathic manipulative medicine (OMM) laboratory learning to appreciate the musculoskeletal system and advance my palpation skills. I tried to keep an open mind and absorb the osteopathic practical and philosophical education that I was receiving. But many of my colleagues did not! They merely went through the "motions" in the laboratory and never gave osteopathic medicine a chance. Others at least appeared interested, but many of these students lacked the confidence in their skills or in their vision of how to incorporate this new tool. And, we still struggled, it appeared, with trying to understand the exact meaning of the osteopathic philosophy and its applied practice and how that differed from allopathic medicine. We were told that the DO degree was not equal to an MD degree plus manipulation, but that seemed to be how our education was being parcelled. For many, 2 years of didactic education only filled us with more questions for which the clinical years that followed offered no answers.

Thankfully, however, I listened to the call to "dig on." I sought out those who could teach me osteopathic medicine and, after my internship, I entered a residency in osteopathic manipulation. Finally, I understand what Andrew Taylor Still meant when he said that our object was to "find health," that osteopathy was sacred because "...it is a healing power through all Nature," and he did "see God in the faces of [his] patients." But, I also know that those others who came into school close-minded or who struggled and then left the influence of osteopathic medical teaching will never understand the incredible legacy that is theirs. They will never know what it is to feel the health and integration in the body or realize the wisdom of Nature as our founder did. And those of us who do will likely never be united with the silent majority who believe osteopathic medicine's only difference is manipulation.

I know that what we have to offer is truly unique and "alternative," and that is my osteopathic medicine. I feel humble and grateful to my predecessors and my present teachers for teaching me that. I only hope that we all find the uniqueness within ourselves, promote the health within our patients, and walk the path with a heart.

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