



What is an Osteopath?

By Deanna Huntwork, DO, Lincoln Hospital



As a doctor, I always encourage patients to ask questions, and believe very strongly that educating people about their health and care options is an important part of my mission. In my time here in Lincoln County, I've found the number one question folks here ask me is what does the DO behind my name stand for, and what does it really mean to my patients.

I, along with family practitioners Rolf Panke and Ralph Monteagudo, am a Doctor of Osteopathy, while many of our colleagues here are Medical Doctors or MDs. Though our background and approach to care may differ, DOs and MDs are the only fully licensed physicians allowed to practice general family medicine. Both are authorized to prescribe medication and perform surgery, and we work very well together.

A Doctor of Osteopathy is a physician who is trained to focus on the whole person with specific attention to the musculoskeletal system. This important system reflects and influences the condition of all other body systems— therefore, a problem in one area can, and does, affect several other connected areas.

Osteopaths attend their own medical schools, but are responsible for the same academic discipline as their MD colleagues. DOs, through an additional 300-plus hours of intensive work with the musculoskeletal system, are trained to have a highly developed sense of touch. DOs are trained as primary care physicians first, but also can pursue a specialty such as general surgery – my specialty. An osteopathic doctor can normalize the body by gently applying pressure to promote movement of fluids, release compressed bones and joints, and eliminate problems in muscle movement. This is called Osteopathic Manipulation.

Osteopathic physicians focus on listening to their patients concerns and examining them as a whole person. This information is then used to prevent and fight disease. Finding a natural way to restore rightful body function is our top priority.

What types of illness does an Osteopath treat? Family practitioners treat virtually any illness from pediatric problems like colic, spitting up, ear, nose and throat to pregnancy, geriatrics, high blood pressure, and heart and lung conditions. This includes emergency and trauma care. We also treat musculoskeletal pain such as neck and back pain and, of course, as a surgeon, I also take care of gastrointestinal problems, female disorders of the breast and pelvis, appendicitis, etc.

In short, Osteopaths and Medical Doctors may have differences in approach and treatment, but we're both highly trained medical professionals who play on the same team. Our differences are strengths when used in a dynamic, collaborative practice like the one we have here at North Basin Medical Clinics where three of our providers are MD's and three are DO's.