

Therapeutic Insight:

The Myofascial Release Perspective

Originally posted on *Massage Mag* 28 May 2009

by John F. Barnes, P.T., L.M.T., N.C.T.M.B.

Myofascial release, the controversy, the facts and the future will be explored in monthly articles I have been asked to write for *MASSAGE Magazine's* Web site (www.MASSAGEMag.com). We will examine various topics and learn about new scientific discoveries about the fascial system. Some of the topics and theories we will discuss are “cutting edge” and, therefore, may spark some controversy. I would encourage readers of these articles to ask any questions or add any thoughts or comments.

You and I were taught logical theories that explained how various techniques accomplished their goals. Theories are stories we make up in an attempt to explain phenomena. I graduated from the University of Pennsylvania as a physical therapist in 1960. I am a very logical person and accepted the theories taught in school and in scientific texts as factual. My entire belief system was then violently ripped apart in an instant when I experienced a life-changing injury. I had been a good athlete; sprinted the 100-yard dash in track events, threw the shot put, played football, skied, drove motorcycles, swam and excelled at competitive karate and weightlifting. But after being injured, my strength was tested both mentally and physically.

Let me go back to the trauma that changed my life, my belief systems and radically expanded my mind and view of healing. I was training for an upcoming weight-lifting competition and went to the gym to work out. There was no one else there to help “spot” me. I was doing high repetition squats with more than 300 pounds, and I got to the point where I couldn't get up from my last repetition. I had been a gymnast when I was younger, so, I decided to do a “back roll” to get out from under the weight, forgetting that when your hands are grasping a bar with more than 300 pounds on it, your hands can't let go. I crashed on the ground with tremendous



force, herniating the disc at L5 and ripping my lumbar ligaments. I laid on the ground stunned and unable to move.

I felt numb from the waist down. After the numbness and shock subsided, the pain began to run through my body, and my body shook violently. In that horrible instant, the things I loved most---motion and competition---were taken from me!

Life became a struggle. I tried every form of therapy available only to be disappointed with temporary results. No one wanted to get better more than me, but I felt trapped by the pain. I was in worse shape than most of my patients. An orthopedist recommended spinal surgery and fused my L5 area. The surgery helped decrease the intensity of the pain, but I still had constant pain, fatigue and limited motion.

There was a point when I realized nobody was going to help me but *me*. I started to lie on my living room floor and treat myself. I found if I put pressure into the areas that hurt or felt hard, it helped to relieve the pain. However, I was still very strong and was trying to “force” my way through the restrictions. Over time, I learned to be gentler and more patient when I treated my tight and painful areas. I learned the problems were not at the “end range” as we were taught. The real problems were in the fascial restrictions that lie before the “end range,” which created symptoms, limitation of “end range” and the resultant pain.

As I continued to treat myself, I made such a dramatic recovery that I realized I had stumbled onto something very important. I had to share this knowledge with my patients and fellow therapists. I found as I put sustained pressure into the tightness, I started to have strange sensations that went far beyond the origin and insertion of a particular muscle. I eventually realized that the principles I was developing must be releasing the connective tissue, the fascia. It was during this time I also fully realized how vital the mind-body connection is in the healing process.

As any athlete knows, the mind-body connection is fascinating and important. I went to physical therapy school to further my knowledge in this area, only to be stunned to discover physical therapy school did not teach anything about the mind-body connection. Now here we are: Close to 50 years have passed and there is still very little appreciation of the mind-body connection.

In the late 1930s, Max Planck, the discoverer of Quantum Physics, said, "Science progresses one death at a time." Science gives a lot of "lip service" to growth, but actually seems to have built into it an attitude that actually retards growth. Unfortunately, traditional science tends to reject any new theory or paradigm that does not match the prevailing belief system.

I will go into more depth about the model of reality we are taught and the new emerging paradigm I believe will be the fundamental basis of therapy and authentic health care in the future. While I certainly would not have chosen all the pain, I realize it was nature's way of helping me look deeper into myself. That trauma, so long ago, initiated a journey. This fascinating "inner journey" continues at this moment, into a deep level of consciousness.

This deeper consciousness, I believe, is the root of authentic healing and living life fully. My goal in these articles and in my myofascial release seminars is to help you achieve these deeper levels of awareness to enhance your abilities as a therapist and the quality of your life. I have traveled around the world to experience a multitude of healing approaches, so I can speak from experience, not just empty theorizing. I have learned many excellent techniques from many cultures. I also saw that many

techniques were "blind alleys," overburdened with ritual or just plain fluff.

I hope to share with you the principles I have developed from my own personal experience and gleaned from clients from around the world over decades. We will explore an exciting new paradigm that is emerging and the important concepts of piezoelectricity, fiber optics, mechanotransduction, fluid dynamics, quantum physics, fractal geometry, complexity and chaos theory, and cellular consciousness.

You are welcome to ask any questions or share your thoughts and insights on my blog, "[Myofascial Release](#)." You can click on the title, or go to www.MASSAGEmag.com and locate the "Expert Insights" tab to see my latest blog.

Health care is undergoing a massive shift, and you and I are the pioneers of an exciting change that will lead to a higher quality of care.

Sincerely,

John

For more information about my myofascial release seminars or myofascial release treatment centers, call (800) 327-2425 or visit www.myofascialrelease.com.

John F. Barnes, P.T., L.M.T., N.C.T.M.B., is an international lecturer, author and acknowledged expert in the area of myofascial release. He has instructed more than 50,000 therapists worldwide in his myofascial release approach, and he is the author of Myofascial Release: the Search for Excellence (Rehabilitation Services, Inc., 1990) and Healing Ancient Wounds: the Renegade's Wisdom (Myofascial Release Treatment Centers & Seminars, 2000). He is on the counsel of Advisors of the American Back Society; is on MASSAGE Magazine's Editorial Advisory Board; and is a member of the American Physical Therapy Association. For more information, visit www.myofascialrelease.com.