

What is Specific Adjustment Technique (SAT)? A Brief History and Medical Background

The concept of Specific Adjusting Technique (S.A.T) started as an accident of fate. The story goes that one day back in the 1950's Parnall Bradbury (osteopath) found himself to be the only practitioner on duty during a flu epidemic. The clinic was for people of limited means and despite the epidemic, there were still almost forty patients to be seen. There was only time to find a key lesion and make a single adjustment on each patient, but the clinical results were astounding especially in those patients who had been adjusted in the atypical areas of the spine (the upper cervicals and the pelvis). S.A.T. as a model of minimal treatment had been born and was to be the forerunner to SAT itself. This method of adjusting one segment at a time effectively gives the body back to itself with very little interference from the practitioner and so is true to Andrew Taylor Still's (founding father of osteopathy) fundamental precept of 'find it, fix it, leave it alone'.

Bradbury later developed the concept of 'positional lesions' which are traumatically induced mobility restrictions affecting primarily the atypical areas of the spine, which require precise adjustment which reverses the force vectors holding the lesion. Through his attention to details and precision, Bradbury observed remarkable changes in the body mechanics of his patients and in the resolution of their pain patterns when treating in this manner. He also went on to publish a paper which describes how specific adjustment of the upper cervicals coincides with a clear rise in blood sugar and adrenaline levels which may contribute to its profound healing effect.

Tom Dummer and Specific Adjustment Technique

by Clifford Conway (Co-Founder of The Highland Chronic Pain and Whiplash Centre)

Tom Dummer was born on October 23rd 1915. After a busy life as an osteopath he died on May 17th 1998, just two years after I graduated; a great and sad loss for myself and the profession. I met Tom when I was a student at the European School of Osteopathy (ESO), of which he was a co-founder. Tom was still teaching at the age of 80 then, albeit only occasionally, passing on his innate knowledge in his 'master classes'. I was very privileged to be able to call Tom a friend. He took me under his wing during the second year of the four year course, and gave me much advice and tuition. He is still my spiritual guide in my work to this day. Many people have noticed and commented on his photograph in my treatment room.

His first contact with osteopathy was in 1942 when his hands were diagnosed with rheumatism, which was interfering with his playing piano. He would study while playing piano in a night club by propping his books up on the piano. He spent many years working as a jazz musician. His health improved dramatically after receiving osteopathy treatment from an American-trained osteopath and naturopath named Harry Clements. This started him on the herbal medicine pathway in his twenties. Some years later he became further interested in osteopathy after visiting an osteopath for a back problem, which set him on a path to a completely new career.

In his lifetime, he wrote a number of books. He wrote one comparing osteopathy, chiropractic, and naturopathy. He wrote another comparing Tibetan medicine and osteopathy after his experience of meeting and treating the Dalai Lama some years earlier, which led to his interest in Buddhism. His book on Tibetan Buddhism describes the basic principles as well as some of the pitfalls on the Dharma road to enlightenment. This book was a collection of his notes from Tibetan Buddhist lectures and teachings accumulated over his life. It is a well regarded book for people studying in the field.

There were four phases in the evolution of osteopathy, according to Tom Dummer: Structural, functional, then cranial with the fourth phase being a holistic return to the source approach to osteopathy, as advocated by A.T. Still. This is described as the osteopathic 'middle way', encompassing all technique approaches in a minimalist way.

During the evolution of this phase, Parnell-Bradbury, Tom's friend and a chiropractor, was rediscovering a minimal approach to treatment by specific structural adjustment (see above). This was the forerunner of Tom Dummer's Specific Adjusting Technique (SAT), which he was developing at the European School of Osteopathy.

SAT utilizes the previous knowledge of various stages and developments in osteopathy to develop a technique that was based in a mechanical but applied in a functional/cranial way. SAT is, in the words of Tom Dummer, a "clinical practice which offers a light, almost 'feather touch,' painless and distinctly non-traumatic treatment".

He felt that in this way osteopathy had turned full circle and returned to the original principles of A.T. Still. Tom Dummer states that the principles of osteopathy are:

The artery is primary (circulation of all body fluids)
Structure governs function
The body as a functional unit that can auto-regulate

This relates to the interfacing of the inner and outer forms of the body and it is because of the interrelation between the structure (outer), and the function (inner), that osteopathy works. Put another way, the outer form is under voluntary control while the inner forms are more subjective and subject to involuntary systems of response.

The classic structural-mechanical approach works primarily with the outer form while the more functional approaches, including cranial, bioenergetics and fluidic, work more directly on the inner form. In a holistic way, the inner form approach works with the voluntary (mechanical) system as well. A.T. Still's original principles worked on both levels of form, this was therefore the 'return to source' embracing all modalities of treatment. As in all opposites in life there is a tendency to find a centre and move around that centre.

Tom Dummer stated that A.T. Still presented the human body in three aspects:

Mind
Function
Structure

Still saw the body as a complex system of "connected oneness" that worked under the three concepts of mechanistic, vitalistic, and spiritual. This is presented in modern literature as mechanical or structural, physiological or functional, and spiritual. Still's work then translates as Matter, Motion, and Mind: Matter being the physical portion of the body; Motion being the action of the combined spirit and mind (as in brain); and Mind being the spirit or soul. These are represented in modern literature as Body, Body-Mind, and Spirit.

Tom Dummer wrote a book on SAT, describing how this technique approach combines with Body-Mind-Spirit in Matter, Movement and Mind to define how these are used in treatment and how SAT

is the choice of treatment for Mind at the unconscious level. Tom used this framework for spinal lesion patterns and saw these three components as Structure, Function, and Mind. This is a complete view of his philosophy as it incorporates elements of body types and Tibetan medicine, as well as Buddhist terms of the elements i.e osteopathy as the perfect complement to Tibetan medicine.