

PATTERNS IN HEALING©₁

Exploring Some Similarities in Different Systems of Healing

By Jacqueline Wurn

Abstract: A comparison is made of the view of the nervous system by different diagnostic and treatment systems. Similarities are drawn between NL reflexes and the sympathetic nervous system, NV reflexes and the parasympathetic nervous system.

I want to explore the similarities in the medical model of nervous system anatomy, the chiropractic model of the reflex system, as well as similarities in cranio-sacral, Jin Shin Jyutsu, and Body-Mind Centering. We will experience some techniques from cranio-sacral and Jin Shin Jyutsu work.

Anatomy books talk about the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. Chiropractic talks about neuro-lymphatic and neuro-vascular reflexes. My hypothesis is that there is a direct correlation between the neuro-lymphatic reflexes and the sympathetic nervous system, as well as a direct correlation between the neuro-vascular reflexes and the parasympathetic nervous system. I want to explore the idea that when a neuro-lymphatic reflex is blocked, the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) is overloaded; when a neuro-vascular reflex is blocked, the parasympathetic nervous system (PSNS) is shut down.

We will examine characteristics and similarities of neuro-lymphatic reflexes, the sympathetic nervous system, and lymphatic fluid. Next we will examine the similarities between neuro-vascular reflexes, the parasympathetic nervous system, and the capillary beds.

Let's look at it through an example:

You are walking home when you hear a ferocious growl and then the sounds of

barking as a dog charges you from behind. Your heart pounds, your stomach is in your mouth, you are terrified, your breathing becomes shallow, and your muscles contract; you are in sympathetic dominance. You whirl around to realize that the dog is inside a fenced space. He can run, but he can't touch you.

You repeat the story several times at work getting yourself very worked up every time you tell it. Perhaps you get very angry and imagine suing the dog's owner. As you continue to relive the fear you reinforce sympathetic dominance in your body making it difficult to digest lunch or relax. This leads to tight neuro-lymphatic knots that cut off lymphatic drainage and energy flow. If you are able to drop the upset of this incident you can return to balance, but this becomes difficult when your daily routine includes more difficulties like traffic to navigate, fumes, and other emotional and environmental stressors.

Sympathetic Nervous System Overwhelm

Consider that stress, a common problem for a large portion of today's population, results in sympathetic nervous system overwhelm. Extended periods of stress lead to a common problem these days: "sympathetic dominance" or "adrenal exhaustion" leading to a compromised immune system.

Long term or even intense short term stress often precedes chronic fatigue and other

immune compromised diseases. The lymphatic system squeezes shut stopping any drainage of lactic acid and other toxic by-products of stress, and painful lumps (blocked neuro- lymphatic points) appear. Touch for Health recognizes the many faces of toxicity in modern life and therefore uses neuro- lymphatic reflexes as top priority for any one-sided correction. On the other hand, health can be defined as an appropriate balance between work and rest, tension and relaxation, contraction and extension, yin and yang.

Neuro-Lymphatic Reflexes 2:

Neuro-lymphatic reflexes are points mostly along the anterior and posterior intercostal spaces. "The neuro-lymphatic reflexes are 'switches' which affect changes in the lymph flow. These changes are brought about, to the best of our knowledge, via the sympathetic and spinal nerves."³

When tender, neuro-lymphatic reflex points are signs that lymphatic drainage is blocked. Just as pressure builds up in a knotted water hose with water running through it, so pressure builds up in a blocked neuro-lymphatic reflex causing discomfort. The more blockage there is, the more there is discomfort; the more chronic the blockage, the more concentrated and dense the tissue feels. By rubbing these dense, tender spots below the skin until they are dissolved we unblock the energy which flows freely once again to the affected muscle, to its associated meridian, and to the meridian's associated organ. An old Chinese saying observes: "There is no disease but stagnation; there is no health but circulation."

Neuro-Vascular Reflexes 4:

Neuro-vascular reflexes are primitive capillary beds thought to date back to a time in evolution before the development of arteries and veins. By touching the skin very lightly over the neuro-vascular reflexes their

associated muscles, meridians, and organs are strengthened. Hard rubbing would turn off a neuro-vascular reflex, its associated muscles, meridian, and organ.

In Touch for Health, we are taught that neuro-vasculars are one method of correction. They are listed in order of priority of use, neuro-vasculars to be used after neuro-lymphatics.

In Neural Organization Technique, a protocol Dr. Carl Ferrari developed, Carl always uses both NV and NL reflexes.⁵ He rubs on the neuro-lymphatic first and then touches the neuro-vascular for a few seconds. Carl says: "Any muscle that is in trouble is congested so use the neuro-lymphatic to flush it. Then you need to turn on the circulation so use the neuro-vascular to begin better blood circulation. Using both is just so much faster to get a result." Better circulation is one result of a turned-on neuro-vascular reflex; better circulation at the periphery of the body, rest, relaxation, and good digestion are characteristics of a strong parasympathetic nervous system.

I personally like to hold neuro-vasculars until I feel the two pulses synchronize. I silently ask them, "Wouldn't you like to synchronize with each other?" They respond.

Holding and looking for synchronization of pulses is a major technique in cranio-sacral work (originated by an osteopath, Dr. Sutherland) and in Jin Shin Jyutsu (originated by a Japanese healer named Murai.) Often, after the pulses synchronize they disappear for a short time. In cranio-sacral work this is called a "still point." At this time, the energetic body goes to a higher degree of organization, as if stepping back and getting a better perspective.

Touch for Health and Neural Organization Technique (both chiropractic in origin) suggest

holding these areas lightly. They do not emphasize feeling the pulses synchronize when touching the neuro-vasculars. Holding them lightly for sixty seconds is sufficient. This example of a healing technique recognized by different healing modalities from different lineages serves as a road sign pointing to a universal truth in healing.

The Hypothalamus

The hypothalamus, a gland that controls the autonomic nervous system (ANS), is a major regulator of homeostasis in the body. It receives input from the emotions, visceral functions, temperature, smooth muscle, cardiac muscle, and various substances in blood. Using the information it receives, it regulates emotions, hunger, thirst, and diurnal rhythms.

The Autonomic Nervous System:

The autonomic nervous system controls smooth muscle, cardiac muscle, and glandular tissues -- those actions that are more or less automatic. The two components of the autonomic nervous system are the sympathetic (SNS) and parasympathetic (PSNS) nervous systems.

As the sympathetic nervous system is turned up, the parasympathetic is turned down and vice versa. The example above with a man frightened by a barking dog can illustrate how this works. If he were on his way to a luncheon and continued to be upset and angry about his scare with the dog, his digestion would be turned off. He would lack hydrochloric acid to digest; he might get heartburn or gas from eating when his sympathetic nervous system was turned on and his parasympathetic nervous system was turned off.

If he were able to calm himself (an excellent way to get rid of excess adrenaline is through physical activity like releasing the scare by walking) he might be able to enjoy his lunch,

digest it well, and have a good story to share about his morning experience.

Sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems are two balancing components of the autonomic nervous system. There are axons from the hypothalamus to both the sympathetic and parasympathetic nuclei in the brain stem and spinal cord.

The Sympathetic Nervous System:

The sympathetic nervous system prepares us for *highly excited states of being - fight, flight, or ecstasy (orgasm)*. It stimulates contraction of heart and smooth muscle, production of sweat, breakdown of glycogen into glucose for energy and action, dilates the eyes, and inhibits digestion. It pulls blood away from the surface of the body and directs it deep into the muscles for immediate action.

The Parasympathetic Nervous System:

The parasympathetic nervous system *regulates those activities that conserve and restore body energy during times of rest or recovery*. It promotes secretion of digestive enzymes, bile, and controls salivation, urination, and defecation.

John Upledger talks about losing the "flexibility of the autonomic nervous system"⁶ due to excess stress activating the sympathetic nervous system daily, building up lactic acid and other toxic by-products beyond the point where they can be released. In order to counteract the high level of sympathetic dominance, the parasympathetic "has to act more powerfully to slow the heart rate, lower the blood pressure, aid the digestive processes and reduce the spasticity of the bowels."⁷ Over time this weakens both sympathetic and parasympathetic responses. From Touch for Health we may recall that an over-energized meridian is really weak; it is constantly working and it is tired so it does not have the amplitude of response that it did before it was overworked.

Fluids

Let's examine the fluids that carry the messages of the neuro-lymphatics and the neuro-vasculars. Remember the old story about the body being like a battery so the first step in muscle testing is to be sure client and practitioner are properly hydrated? We know from Touch for Health and One Brain that hydration is a necessity for accurate muscle testing.

"The fluids (lymph, blood, intercellular, and intracellular fluids) are the transportation system of the body. They underlie presence and transformation and play a major role in the overall counterbalancing of tension and relaxation, rest and action. The characteristics of each fluid system relate to a different quality of movement, touch, voice, and state of mind. These relationships can be approached from the aspects of movement, mind state, or from the anatomical and physiological functioning."⁸

This quote is from Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, a gifted healer who was trained as an Occupational Therapist but found her profession too limiting. She studied with Laban and other innovative teachers of our time. She combines scientific knowledge with her bold intuition and years of experience. She has a School for Body-Mind Centering in Massachusetts. Note the holistic view here, similar to that of Chinese medicine, recognizing emotional and physical attributes as two aspects of the same overall picture. More specifically note her description of lymph and its similarity to our understanding of the neuro-lymphatic reflexes and the sympathetic nervous system:

Lymphatic Fluid

"Lymph...deals with defense, survival, the setting of limits and the crystallization of action;" It has to do with "becoming aware of

your present situation and feeling what you would like to do next. Once you have decided, do it with directness and clarity - no hesitation or wobbliness."⁹ Compare this to the directness of fight, flight, or ecstasy (orgasm) in the sympathetic nervous system.

Observations

Of the primitive capillary beds. Ms. Cohen says "Capillary iso-rings are the places of suspended rest between going and coming. The characteristic qualities of the iso-rings are restful alertness and expanded peacefulness when there is balanced tone."

The iso-rings are the furthest end of the closed loop system through which blood circulates on its path from the heart. This would also define neuro-vascular reflexes except that they appear only on the head. Ms Cohen suggests an experience to know the feeling of the capillary iso-rings.

"Find the transition moment between the two phases of your capillary exploration, between the metered beats (of the arteries) and the elongated undulating movements (of the veins) let that restfulness spread throughout your body."

Note the similarity to the characteristics of the parasympathetic nervous system (rest and regeneration) and the neuro-vasculars (increased circulation) in this description of the fluids. Imagine capillary iso-rings just under the skin, the most distant point from the heart where blood puddles up and rests before beginning its homeward trip. These "places of suspended rest" may be analogous to still points in cranio-sacral therapy where the pulse stops and the body rests, is able to gain a better perspective, and then reorganizes itself with a higher degree of organization.

While most autonomic nervous system responses are thought to be involuntary, we know that some yogis and meditators have

control over these responses. They can raise or lower their blood pressure at will. To some extent we can all control these centers. By rubbing the neuro-lymphatics and touching the neuro-vasculars we can reset the body's balance or, as Upledger says, "restore autonomic flexibility." Quieting our minds, doing yoga, an appropriate exercise program, and a sense of structure all give the body a chance for relaxation and an appropriate balance between work and rest.

Rubbing a tender neuro-lymphatic releases the strangle-hold of tension and allows the release of congested lymph and the toxic by-products of stress. Gently touching neuro-vascular areas creates better circulation, inducing relaxation and an invitation to recall a calm state of being. Touching a neuro-vascular or rubbing a neuro-lymphatic can also be directed toward relieving a memory of stress held in the tissues. It should not be surprising that the skin could be a great communicator of information when we recall that in the fetus the same cells that form the nervous system form the skin.

Neuro-vasculars occur on the skin over the brain, our personal central processing unit. Note that the neuro-vasculars we hold for stress are located on the forehead over the cerebrum, the part of our brain that deals with "here and now."

The search for balance has led different people to some of the same techniques. Their similarities and differences provide fertile ground for more exploration. The nervous system needs balance between sympathetic and parasympathetic systems for human beings to live in a state of balance. They need to work and rest alternately. And we forever swing back and forth on the pendulum of yin and yang, giving and taking, resting and acting.

References and Footnotes:

- 1 Reprinted by permission from the author.
2. In the 1930's Frank Chapman, D.O. discovered the neuro-lymphatic reflexes. In 1963 Dr. George Goodheart correlated the association of neuro-lymphatics and organs with specific muscles. Then in 1974 Dr. John Thie compiled this information in his book, *Touch for Health*, originally a layperson's guide to self-health.
3. Gordon Stokes and Mary Marks, DC, Dr. Sheldon Deal's *Chiropractor's Assistants and Doctors Basic AK Workshop Manual*.
4. Also in the 1930's, Dr. Terence Bennett discovered neuro-vascular reflexes, locations on the head that he believed influence the vascularity of different organs and structures.
5. Neural Organization Technique organizes the many discrete pieces of information in Applied Kinesiology into an organized protocol. The strength of this work is exemplified by the fact that I can count on any scoliosis client leaving at least one half inch taller after an N.O.T. session.
- 6 John E. Upledger, DO & Jon D. Vredevoogd, MFA. *Craniosacral Therapy*.
- 7 see footnote 5 above.
- 8 Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action*.
- 9 see footnote 7 above

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