

STRUCTURAL INTEGRATION – A PERSONAL JOURNEY OF SHIFTS

By James Earls KMI (Adv), BA (Hons)

Nearly twenty years ago I started my first training on complementary therapies, full of enthusiasm and a box brimming with essential oils I set up my first clinic in an old swimming baths. In the early years my career waxed and waned with many different choices of centres and clinics, working with a variety of other practitioners and training in a range of disciplines. I had added reflexology, on-site and Indian head massage. Great therapies, but I was mostly working from the relaxation paradigm.

Eventually I started working within a chiropractic clinic, a rich source of clients who just wanted to get better and they wanted their improvement quickly. There was no time for quiet soporific music and meditation, a long consultation and blending of oils. Clients were on the table for about twenty five minutes and they wanted to feel the results in that time so I had to start using massage methods that were specific to their complaint and so I added remedial techniques to my armoury.

Myself and one of the young chiropractors became quite a team, referring back and forth when necessary we got quite adept at recognizing when a client needed the attention of the other for maximum benefit. We took some pride in being able to get clients “better” in as few treatments as possible, I would get rid of their trigger points, stretch the shorter muscles with MET and he would make sure their joints were moving correctly. Despite our instructions once the clients were discharged they often failed to keep up with a maintenance program of treatment and so would often reappear six or eight months later with the same or similar pain.

Now the chiropractor and myself knew what to do with them and we would treat them in fewer sessions than before and consider ourselves great therapists for having them pain free in 4 or 5 treatments rather than the original 8 or 9. They would be discharged and once again usually neglect to come back for maintenance and guess what? They’d be back in the clinic in a number of months complaining of the same old thing but maybe this time it had changed a little, spread to another area or maybe even more sore and debilitating than the first time and we’d set of on our dance once again.

It was at this time, late ‘90s, that I came across an advert for Tom Myers who was coming to Dublin to give a workshop on “Anatomy Trains”. I had no idea what that was but I’d been collecting his series of articles from a massage magazine and I liked the way he explained anatomy, something that had been rare in my continuing education so I signed up.

Much of the presentation went over my head at the time, my anatomy was poor and my concentration worse but what I did get was the message of a new way of working, a new way of looking at clients and an answer to my question of why those clients kept coming back to us every few months with the same problems. Tom talked a lot about the new (to me!) paradigm of spatial medicine, the need to look at the entire shape of the person standing in front of you and to find ways of helping their structure come back to a better balance.

Tom showed us how an imbalance in one part of the body can pull on other structures, creating forces and tensions that can lead to pain somewhere else in the body but that this pain is often not the cause, but rather the symptom of the distal imbalance. As an example look at Sally’s structure in figure 1, you can see how there may be a lot of compression and therefore pain in her low back but is that just because of short hip flexors and low back extensors? Look at the hyperextension in her knees, the forward positioning of her pelvis and the posterior tilt of her rib cage coupled with the anterior shift of her head. All of these factors will conspire to put her lumbar into that pattern. It would be pointless to only work on the flexors and extensors around the symptomatic area without balancing the rest of the structure otherwise the forces will push her back into her original pattern.

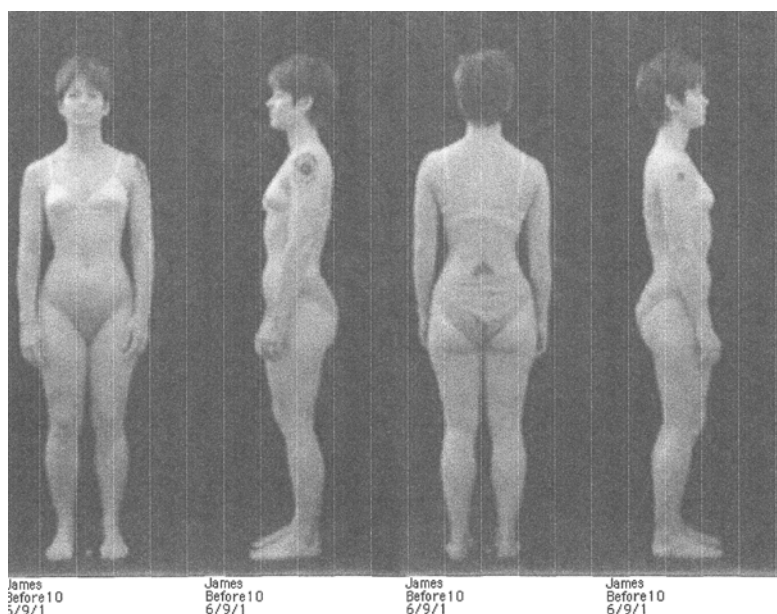


Figure 1

This is one of the basic tenets of structural integration, Tom said. By working with the client to bring them into better overall alignment we can take the strain off the whole structure. Light bulbs went off in my head and I realized the mistake we had been making in the chiropractic clinic. I saw why our treatments were offering short-term relief, we were failing to see the entire pattern. Clients complain about the weak parts in their structure, where they feel pain, but this is often not the cause of the issue.

Tom had been teaching anatomy for the Rolf Institute for quite a few years and had now developed his theory of the Anatomy Trains to such an extent that he was setting up his own school to teach structural integration. This discipline had been developed by Dr Ida Rolf during the 40's and 60's and gradually formulated it into a series of 10 sessions that she began to teach in the late 60's and 70's. Based on her experiences of osteopathy and yoga coupled with her studies of biochemistry and homeopathy Dr Rolf's format acknowledged the body's ability to remodel itself in response to appropriate manipulation of the myofascia. By taking on gradual changes the body will eventually come back to a better balance which will not only improve the structural functioning but also its metabolic, psychological and emotional balance will be improved.

I was convinced and decided to train with Tom in structural integration and have been running a mixed clinic since. I perform both massage and SI work with my clients, my relaxation training helps my remedial work and both help to inform my structural work which now underlies everything that I do. The structural training brought everything else I had done into a framework and context, some of my clients don't want or can't afford to follow through all of the sessions but we can adapt them to suit their needs and ability, the first part of the training was a 3 session series which is a great introduction to the work and is still complete enough to gain many changes in their structure.

The vision that structural integration gives is one of my most powerful tools, the ability to see and read a posture and understand where a strain may be originating from gives a powerful understanding of where best to focus my attention on during any remedial treatments. It has given me many skills and abilities and I am forever amazed by the ways the body responds to the type of touch used in structural integration, it deepens my practice and allows me to work with clients to change not just their structure but even the way they feel about their bodies and, sometimes, their lives.

It is a different paradigm and sometimes shifting from one to another can be difficult but for me it was the most rewarding change I made to my practice. It is not better than other ways of working it is just an alternative but it offers bodyworkers a complete vision of that human standing in front of them asking for help and provides many new tools to do so. If you'd like to enhance your ability to create change for your clients I highly recommend it.

James Earls is an Advanced KMI practitioner practicing in Belfast. He is also founder and director of Ultimate Massage Solutions (selling books and DVDs) and Kinesis UK (providing myofascial training throughout Europe). He can be contacted at info@anatomytrains.co.uk or +44 (0)2890 481267.



KMI Structural Integration Training in the UK



Learn how to achieve the following results with your clients using KMI Structural Integration and the Anatomy Trains® theory:

- Complete body image
 - Skeletal alignment and support
 - Tensegrity/span/palintonicity
 - Length
 - Resilience
 - Ability to hold and release somato-emotional change
 - Unity of intent with diffuse awareness
 - Reduced effort in standing and movement
 - Range of motion, generosity of movement
 - Reduced pain



For more information or to register:
call +44 (0)2890 481267
email info@anatomytrains.co.uk

Weston on the Green - Oxfordshire -
Part 1 commencing 13 January 2009