

Biodynamic or Biomechanical
By Cherionna Menzam, Ph.D., OTR/L, BCST, RCST®

The most common question I hear from potential students inquiring about Craniosacral Biodynamics is, What is Biodynamics and how does it differ from other forms of Cranial therapy?

Essentially, Biodynamics involves a shift in perception from our usual way of seeing in our modern, western culture. In Biodynamics, our main orientation is to the forces that form us, rather than to the effects of those forces. We can say that more “biomechanical” approaches look at the body as being like a machine. If a machine is broken, the mechanic looks to see where and what the problem is and then uses that information to fix it. If I have a painful knee, for example, I might go to a doctor for an assessment. Various tools are used, such as x-rays, MRI, etc. Depending on the findings, the doctor might then prescribe anti-inflammatory medications, extract fluid from the joint, send me to a physical therapist for exercises, and/or recommend surgery to clean out or replace the joint. All of this can be highly useful.

More subtle biomechanical approaches are common in cranial therapies. Practitioners often use motion testing to determine the patterns and nature of resistances between cranial bones and other structures. Techniques are then gently applied to release the resistances and compressions present and to generate greater ease of motion. This kind of biomechanical approach was initially applied to cranial structures by William G. Sutherland, an early osteopath who developed Cranial Osteopathy or Osteopathy in the Cranial Field. Over the approximately forty years of his exploration of craniosacral dynamics, however, he gradually widened his perception from a particular cranial dysfunction to include more and more of the whole of the human system. He realized that the cranial bones moved in conjunction with all other tissue structures in the body, along with subtle rhythmical, tide-like fluctuations of the body’s fluids.

Sutherland’s awareness became increasingly subtle through his life. In the later years of his career, he described a mysterious presence called the Breath of Life, which he sensed to be the underlying source of the tidal fluctuations he had been sensing within and around the body. He termed the expression of this inherent health, *primary respiration*, and it has become the main orientation of biodynamic craniosacral therapist to orient to primary respiration as the ground for all session work.

Biodynamics, which evolved from these later discoveries of Sutherland, involves attending to these deeper organizing forces, rather than orienting solely to their effects in physical form. Biodynamic practitioners work with both these deeper, universal forces and the conditional forces and related patterns that affect each individual. As conditional patterns and the forces that organize them are sensed by the biodynamic practitioner, this is held within the wider context of primary respiration. For example, a knee may be painful because of a recent injury or may be expressing a culmination of an old injury plus years of wear and tear, poor nutritional habits, and lack of appropriate exercise. While it may be helpful to address these issues via analysis and techniques, our main interest in

Biodynamics is to re-establish a relationship to the deeper ordering forces which Sutherland called the *potency* of the Breath of Life, and to support them in expressing their profound intelligence. Thus the biodynamic practitioner perceptually practices holding the expression of conditions, like the knee described above, within the wider context of primary respiration and its potency.

This is a perceptual shift, quite different from how most of us are taught to look at things in school and life. Rather than narrowing our view to focus in on what is wrong, such as the mechanics of the injury in the tissues, we deepen and widen our perceptual field and enter a still being-state. As we slow down, and support the client in also settling deeper than the pain (or whatever history or conditions are presenting), we enter a new field of perception. We become aware of slow, subtle fluctuations of the fluids in the body in relation to a central mid-line. As we orient to this expression of primary respiration, the motion we sense is remarkably similar to the fluid dynamics recorded in the early embryo as it is forming. Again, we are in touch with original formative forces existing prior to the injury or other history the client may be suffering with. It may even feel like we are holding a tiny embryo floating within a luminescent womb. We may have a sense of the current physical form dissolving and softening, as it apparently returns to embryonic fluidity. In this less differentiated state, the body seems to form itself anew.

If we consider an embryo forming, we can appreciate that little ones are designed to be held within the loving, nurturing field of the mother, her partner and family and surrounding community. Craniosacral Biodynamics, also known as Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy, is a specific form of Biodynamics developed by Franklyn Sills. Sills has built on the work of Sutherland and others, like Sutherland's student Roland Becker, who disseminated the later teachings of Sutherland. Sills has not only brought into this work the influences of his years of study of Buddhist and Taoist teachings, but also the importance of what he terms the "relational field," established between therapist and client.

During a Biodynamic session, we can see the practitioner as representing a receptive holding field similar to that needed by the little one in the womb and in early life. Practitioners learn to settle into a neutral, meditative state while supporting clients in being in present time with awareness of what is resourcing and supportive for them. Again, our orientation is to what is prior to and deeper than whatever trauma may arise, as we access the inherent health, fluidity, and potency of the system. Like a mother with her wounded child, we seek to support our clients in calming and remembering the health and love that is so much greater than the scratched knee. A mother who simply puts a band-aid on the knee would be practicing as a biomechanical mom. Our Biodynamic intention is deeper. We soothe and support, aiming to meet the whole of our clients, including the mysterious field that holds and forms us all.

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