

## Book Review

***An Integrative Approach to Treating Babies and Children: A Multidisciplinary Guide***, John Wilks, Editor. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. ISBN: 9781848192829.

In the modern medical model, we can be prone to focusing on the disease process when treating our patients. With recent applications of holistic or integrative medicine, we are beginning to understand the importance of treating all aspects of a person: mind, body, and spirit. *An Integrative Approach to Treating Babies and Children* explores the use of such an approach on one of the most vulnerable populations, our babies. The book is made up of essays written by specialists in their fields that tackle common issues like excessive crying and recurring illness. Approaches for treatment of the entire family are described, as infants are of course a part of a family unit and should not be considered isolated patients. As a new parent myself, I have found the information in this book to be not only helpful in my practice as a new nurse, but also in caring for my infant daughter.

One of the major strengths of the book is discussion of how the mother's environment before, during, and after pregnancy can impact the infant's health. Chapters examine the implications of traumatic stress in the pregnant mother and how to treat pregnant women as a means of fostering fetal well-being. Other chapters describe in detail how family dynamics, both during pregnancy and after, can impact the infant's health, and how to incorporate the health of the parents in therapy practice. When parents are seeking help for dealing with a fussy newborn, for example, it is just as important to support the parents as it is to investigate the cause of the newborn's behavior.

Another strength of the book is the examination of infant behavior. Much detail is given to describing behaviors that are observed in infants referred to as "baby body language." Authors describe how infants can use baby body language to tell the story of their development. Although some chapter authors may read too far into some of the observed baby behaviors, I do not feel this takes away from the overall usefulness of watching for these behaviors in infants. As I have watched my own baby grow, I can certainly see the importance of examining baby body language. Body language is one of the only tools babies have to communicate with their parents and healthcare providers. I have personally begun to notice behaviors in my own daughter that I would not have without reading this book, and it has likely improved our relationship by enhancing my understanding of her.

Much of the book focuses on the use of craniosacral therapy on infants. This treatment method is based on claims that the cerebrospinal fluid around the human brain makes rhythmic movements in a similar fashion to the heart or lungs and that these rhythms can be read through the skull and spinal column. These rhythms can theoretically be used to detect disease, and application of gentle pressure can be used as a treatment. Although these claims are not widely accepted by the broader medical community, if there is one population that I can believe might benefit from application of this practice, it would likely be newborns and infants still undergoing skull development. Chapters detail how to use craniosacral therapy to calm fussy babies by relieving tension and generating alignment through gentle palpation of the skull, neck, spine, and sacrum. One could understand how these tiny bodies, that are exposed to the strong forces of the mother's body during the birthing process, can hold on to tension, and that this might impact their behavior. Further, it is common for pediatricians to recommend a daily gentle message to help wind babies down for bedtime.

On some subjects, chapter authors can take things to interesting places. One such chapter discusses the development of memory. It is stated that we can carry with us memories that date back to our own conception and that these memories can affect our behavior into adulthood. Strategies are explored for how to treat issues surrounding conception and early pregnancy in patients. I find these claims to be dubious. The notion that we could retain some memory of a time long before our first neurons formed their first synapses is to some, on its surface, preposterous. I believe our cells may only harbor such memories in terms of how this environment would affect our gene expression, as has been demonstrated by the principles of epigenetics. In spite of the lack of science to back up this theory, it may nevertheless be useful in the treatment of clients with longstanding histories of trauma as a form of guided imagery practice.

Some of the ideas described in later chapters have the potential to be harmful and are not based on concrete scientific evidence. One chapter mentions a correlation between autism and acetaminophen use for treatment of fever associated with vaccination. There have been correlational studies showing a relationship between acetaminophen use and autism rates, but this does not indicate a causative effect. Autism is a complex disorder that has been shown to have strong genetic components as well as environmental risk factors, and parents should be cautious about holding off on treating their child's fever for fear of causing autism.

Other chapters warn about using soap to wash infants and state that babies should only ever be bathed with water for fear of ruining their microbiome. Another author describes exactly what foods to introduce to a baby in a precise order to support the cultivation of healthy gut microbes. While the idea of maintaining proper skin and digestive health

are certainly important things to consider in treatment of babies, and nutrition has been shown to be a major contributor to overall health, there is insubstantial evidence to back up the claims for these specific diet and bathing restrictions.

Overall, this book is a beautiful exploration of how to holistically treat babies, children, and families. I recommend that many of the claims be carefully considered pending further evidence. If you are an expectant mother who is prone to being stressed out by how your pregnancy or parenting may affect your little one, you may want to hold off on reading this book. That being said, there is certainly a plethora of useful information to be found between these covers for healthcare professionals who work with children and families. Those who are trained to have a skeptical eye can benefit from reading this book.

Reviewed by Courtney L. Williams, PhD, BSN