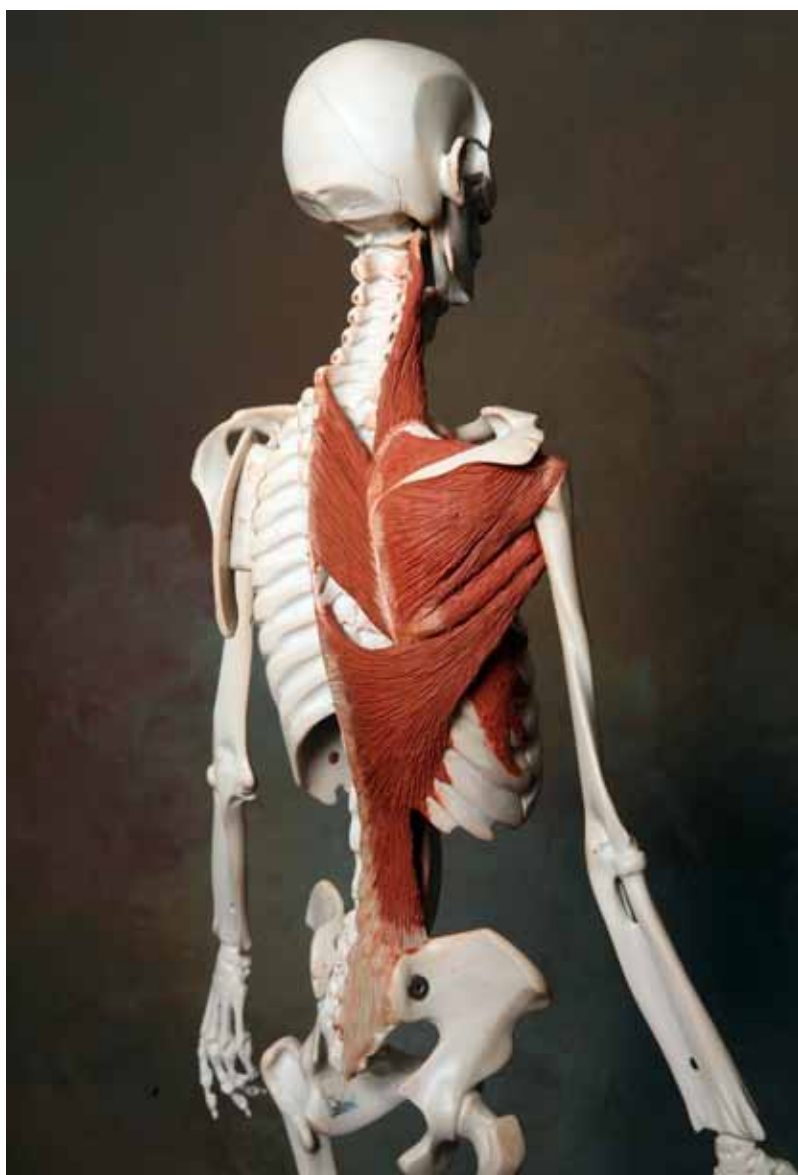


Body Mechanics

by Joseph E. Muscolino



“It can be argued that the fundamental basis for all clinical orthopedic manual and movement therapies is a solid understanding of anatomy.

”

Learning Muscles with Clay

Thoroughly understanding anatomy is integral to massage therapy, and learning muscles by constructing them in clay can be a great way to deepen your understanding of the subject.

It can be argued that the fundamental basis for all clinical orthopedic manual and movement therapies is a solid understanding of anatomy. After all, if you know anatomy (structure), you can figure out physiology (function). And if you know physiology, you can understand what pathophysiology (altered physiology of a condition) is. And if you know pathophysiology, you can figure out how to assess that condition. And if you know assessment, you can critically think to determine what treatment is appropriate for that condition. In other words, knowing anatomy can be the key that allows for the critical thinking that empowers you to creatively apply the appropriate treat-

ment techniques for the condition with which your client presents.

The irony is that many students look at anatomy as a course that must be endured and passed in order to move on to the more “important” courses on assessment and treatment. To these students, anatomy is nothing more than a dry and abstract subject that is an exercise in putting Latin-derived names on all the many structures of the body. As a result, they do not learn their anatomy well. And much of what they do learn is soon forgotten after leaving school.

Not knowing anatomy then requires them to have to work much harder in their physiology, pathophysiology, assessment and treatment technique classes because, without the fundamental basis of anatomy, instead of learning to understand the content, they must memorize it. This results in them having to memorize cookbook routines instead of learning how to critically think and appropriately apply treatment techniques to best treat the various orthopedic conditions with which their clients present.

So why do so many students resist spending the time and effort to learn anatomy well? I believe the problem is often two-fold. First, their instructor may not have applied the concepts of anatomy to the conditions that they would encounter once they are out in practice, so

they were not taught to see how relevant and important anatomy is to clinical massage. Second, the manner in which they were taught anatomy may have been dry and abstract, often auditory lecture at best supplemented with visual illustrations.

What’s unfortunate about this method is that the body is a three-dimensional marvel of engineering, and teaching and learning the structure of the body—especially the muscles—should stem from an appreciation of the beauty of its architecture.

This beauty can be best appreciated if the teaching approach is dynamic and kinesthetic. Massage therapy, and indeed every manual and movement therapy, is a kinesthetic field, and for this reason attracts students and therapists who often learn best with kinesthetic methods. One such method that is effective for teaching muscles (and all myofascial tissues) is palpation. Being taught how to palpate the muscles as they are being learned can make the learning process more accessible. However, as excellent as palpation is, it is still a somewhat indirect way to learn the muscles of the body. After all, the muscles must be palpated through the skin, making a true sense of their location challenging to appreciate—especially for the deeper muscles.

A more direct and creative kinesthetic approach for learning muscles is to actually design and create them in

PHOTOS OF MANIKEN® WITH FULL PERMISSION BY AND ATTRIBUTION TO JON ZAHOUREK





clay and then place them on a miniature skeleton (usually approximately 30 inches tall).

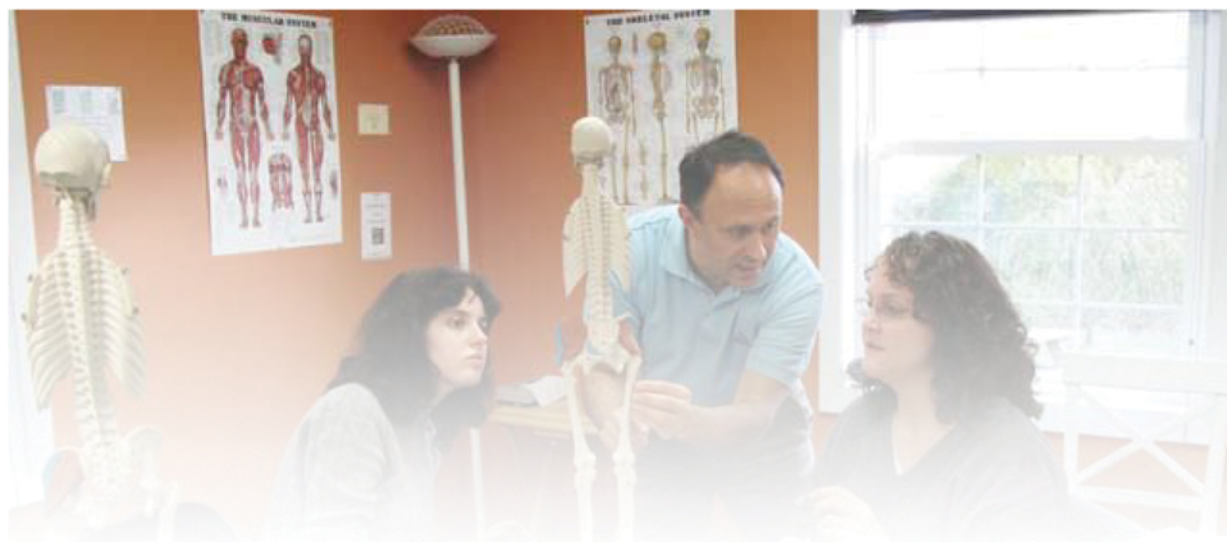
Learning Muscles with Clay

Learning muscles with clay involves actually creating in clay the muscles (and other myofascial tissues) that are being learned, and then placing them on the model skeleton. By doing this, the student becomes both an artist and engineer as they design and form each muscle by hand and place it on the skeleton. This method of learning is more time intensive, but the time spent is not wasted. Rather, taking the time to work with each muscle creates an enriching experience that enhances familiarity with and knowledge of the muscles of the body.

Step one: Forming the muscle. First, by creating and forming a muscle from clay, the student comes to understand and appreciate its shape. Is the muscle round or flat? Is it strap-shaped, square or triangular? Is it thick or thin? What is its width and length? Working with these factors creates an intimacy with the three-dimensional structure of the muscle that cannot be gained from auditory lecture, flat two-dimensional illustrations or even palpation. And this intimate knowledge of the muscle's form will enhance the student's/therapist's ability to assess and treat the muscles in their practice.

“Accessing creativity while learning the science of anatomy can help to blend linear and nonlinear thought, marrying together proverbial right-brain and left-brain thinking.

”



To have access to the complete article, subscribe to Digital COMT.

[CLICK HERE TO SUBSCRIBE!](#)