

## **Interview with Danny Sandra, co-founder of the International Cranio Research Congress, published in The Fulcrum, May 2024, CSTA.**

“The goal of the Congress is to inspire confidence in the work that we do. Although this therapy is quite young and not always scientifically supported, what we do matters. Our work matters to our clients, to the world, to ourselves and to our community. With this congress, we want to emphasize that”.

### **Please tell us a bit about yourself, your background and what you do today.**

I have an engineering background but after a series of soul encounters, I embarked on a spiritual journey that opened my heart and started me thinking that there must be something greater in life, something transcendental.

My quest for meaning led me to a course on intuitive development, and after a few years, I stumbled upon CST. I started studying it, partly out of interest and because I heard it could be beneficial for children with attention challenges, such as my son.

Today, I continue my work as a change expert, assisting companies undergoing transformation or change processes. I'm passionate about helping them become more conscious and fully present in their decision-making. My background as a craniosacral therapist helps me to sense what is really going on in organizations. It's akin to treating a person; I can discern what is flowing and not flowing, feel the rhythm, and where there is resistance, tension, etc. When I step into a company, I can easily feel where there is some tension, or something not going well. I find the synergy between CST and my work with organizations very inspiring.

### **Where did you study Craniosacral Therapy and what continues to excite you about it?**

I began my CST journey in 2007 at the Peirsman Cranio Sacraal Academie, first in the home of Etienne Peisman in Antwerp, Belgium and later in Bussum, The Netherlands. The courses were taught in separate modules, giving me a lot of freedom to combine these studies with my work and family commitments. I graduated in 2013 and established my own practice in Kortrijk, Belgium.

In my CST practice, I primarily concentrate on stress management, exploring stress release through the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal axis, and facilitating SomatoEmotional Release.

## **How does CST inform your work with organisations?**

Working as a therapist is incredibly inspiring. We encounter powerful moments; when something beautiful unfolds, it feels like magic. That's the spirit I strive to bring into my work with organizations. In essence, CST nurtures me.

Etienne Peirsman, the founder of the Peirsman Cranio Sacraal Academie, introduced me to the 'no mind' state, which I often refer to as the 'no judgement state'. It involves looking at a client with neutral eyes, without judgement and with an open heart, and that is already remarkably powerful. People open up when they sense they are not being judged, when there's no critique of what they are doing right or wrong. This creates a safe space for them to express themselves. This principle holds true for companies as well. As a change manager or expert, how you act or how you approach challenges in an organization has already a significant impact.

## **What led to your interest in research and founding the Cranio Research Congress**

My passion for learning led me to delve deeper into my spiritual journey, exploring diverse areas such as spiritual leadership, rhythm, entrainment, and heart coherence. During my PhD, one of the focuses was on investigating the connection between craniosacral therapy, spiritual leadership, and heart coherence. Although this study faced initial challenges, the research revealed a notable synchronization of rhythm during craniosacral therapy sessions, highlighting the need for further exploration. This study was eventually published in the European Journal of Integrative Medicine, expanding my understanding of the vast potential within CST.

The Cranio Research Congress originated from an idea my co-founder Yohanam Arulandu, from the Upledger Institute in the Netherlands, and I had over dinner in 2018. We discussed the fascinating potential of CST for research and mutually agreed it would be valuable for schools to get together and collaborate, acknowledging that we're in fact doing the same thing, but in different ways. Creating an international platform for researchers and practitioners to share their studies and experiences became our shared vision for the Cranio Research Congress.

As a voluntary effort, it took us a few years to develop our first Congress, and it was a steep learning curve. Due to COVID, our first Congress took place online, which had its advantages and disadvantages. Our second edition occurred last year in 2022 at the University of Antwerp, well located for participants from Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK and Germany. We had a dozen people working and presenting at that Congress. We're now eagerly anticipating the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition in November 2024.

## **What is your mission and hope for the congress and CST going forward?**

The objective of the platform has always been to remain independent from any school or institution teaching craniosacral therapy. Instead, it's about bridging the differences in terminology and technique, gathering as a community around listening to the human body and its craniosacral rhythms, our own centeredness and stillness.

I think CST is still at its infancy and scientifically underdeveloped. Research isn't about determining what's right or wrong; it's about exploring, asking questions, reflecting, developing, and growing. Hopefully, after many more editions of the CRC there will be a body of work, discussions, and questions that have contributed to building and further developing the foundations of CST.

## **What has the response been to the congress so far, from craniosacral colleagues and healthcare practitioners from related fields?**

Both editions of the congress have been successful so far. Attendees truly appreciated the event and recognized the added value we provided. The in-person experience last year made a significant difference. Engaging conversations flourished during lunch and coffee breaks, and the Friday evening walking dinner brought people together with great food, meaningful conversations, networking, and dancing. While we are still in the early stages, we are actively exploring ways to expand our reach and connect with more people in the future. Ideas and suggestions are very welcome.

## **Has there been a presentation that has been transformative for you?**

It's challenging to put into words. Personally, the event itself was transformative for me, featuring numerous inspiring presentations. For instance, **Gery Pollet**, a serial entrepreneur, shared research on how water influences our bodies and the entire system. Although the research wasn't specific to CST, exploring the connection between water in the body and our intentions and mindset proved incredibly fascinating.

**Rollin McCraty**, PhD, from the HeartMath Institute, presented remarkable research on coherence and our impact on global coherence. Given my research focus on coherence and entrainment, seeing this in a broader perspective and how craniosacral therapists indirectly contribute to global coherence was truly inspiring.

Additionally, **Heidemarie Haller**, PhD, in her presentation "Empowering body and mind: a craniosacral research perspective," delved into fundamental aspects of CST research.

In the first edition, Nicola Brough's PhD talk on "Measuring what matters to CST clients" caught my attention, particularly considering the need for clinically validated measures to support or validate the impact of our work.

## How do you choose the theme for a congress? And what is next year's theme?

The theme selection process is quite intuitive, although we do consult the experts in the field to ensure relevance. For our 2nd Congress last year, the theme was “Cranio at Heart” covering presentations on water, energy, and bone tissue in relation to the heart.

The theme for the 3rd congress in November 2024 is “The brain and the second brain”. In today's digital age, our brains are significantly impacted by technology, such as mobile phones and 5G networks, as well as our nutrition. Navigating these challenges with craniosacral therapy is the primary focus of this congress, bringing together researchers and practitioners in the field.

## Can you tell us who will be presenting in 2024?

We have an array of esteemed speakers lined up for the next year's event. **Nikki Kenward** CST, renowned for her book on the second brain, is among our confirmed speakers. Additionally, we are privileged to have **Etienne Peirsman** CST, the founder of PCSA in The Netherlands, who will share insights from his wonderful brain modules. The way he explains how the brain works and what we can do as therapists is just amazing. **René Zweedijk** DO BSc will also join us. He will be presenting a recently published research paper on osteopathy in the cranial field. Other notable speakers are **Jan Camus** DO CST, a seasoned practitioner renowned for expertise in brain and attention disorders, and **Michel Lootens** DO CST, a highly skilled professional with extensive experience in shock- and trauma resolution.

We are honored to host neurologist and neuroscientist **Melanie Boly** MD PhD, a Belgian researcher currently residing and working in the United States. She focuses her research on the brain and altered states of consciousness, bringing valuable insights to our discussions.

The Cranio Research Congress serves as a platform for inspiration and deep reflection on our work. In light of the challenges posed by COVID, we are keen to explore the concept of ‘remote CST’ and its practical applications. To delve into this topic, we have invited **Roberta Ogilvie** CST BSc, a craniosacral therapist and medical anthropologist from Brazil, as well as **Annemieke Romeijn** CST MA, a Dutch craniosacral therapist practicing in Amsterdam. Annemieke, who studied in the UK, serves as the Craniosacral Therapy Association UK trustee, leading a working group to provide guidance to the association and its members.

Furthermore, **Scott Sternthal** DO will return to enlighten us on the Primary Respiratory Mechanism (PRM) within bone tissue in relation to the brain and second brain.

### **Is it possible for practitioners to access the presentations or research papers?**

We have not been able to provide access to previous presentations, but our aim for 2024 is to host a hybrid event, online and live, to reach a wider audience. Since much of the research is conducted in English, we plan to leverage language translation technology for automatic generation and translation of subtitles into various languages. Additionally, we are also exploring options for on-demand access, allowing viewers to watch presentations at their convenience.

### **Where do you think the most exciting research is taking place today?**

That's a great question, but I don't have a definitive answer. This is precisely why we believe the CRC is necessary – to provide that platform. By offering language translation, we hope to connect with countries and researchers where English is not well understood. Hopefully, during the 4<sup>th</sup> congress in 2026, they can present in their native languages with subtitles for the rest of us.

This idea of bringing people together to share knowledge and ideas is truly exciting and inspiring. We strive for the platform to grow into a community or even a movement. It's really one step at a time. Much like in craniosacral therapy, we just sense what is needed, and then take another step forward.

For more information about international Cranio Research Congress, go to [www.cranioresearchcongress.org](http://www.cranioresearchcongress.org)