

Reiki Energy Medicine: Enhancing the Healing Process

by Alice Moore, RN, BS, Reiki Master

Hartford Hospital Dept. of Integrative Medicine, Hartford, CT

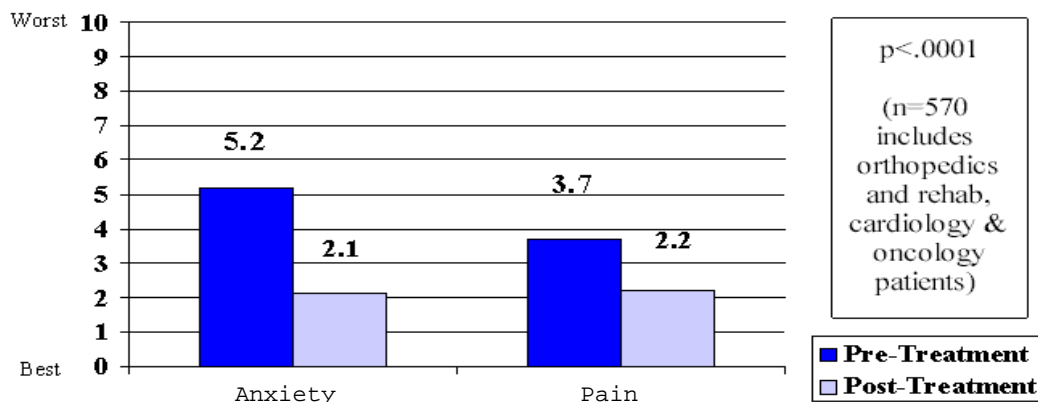


With increasing frequency and confidence, we speak of Energy Medicine (also known as “energy work”) as if it was a new form of therapy for our patients’ ailments. Not so. Thousands of years ago ancient cultures understood intuitively what scientific research and practitioners world-wide are confirming today about the flow (or lack of flow) of energy in the body and, how the use of energy therapies can enhance the healing process. As well known medical surveys report approximately 50% of the American public using some form of complementary or alternative therapy, “energy work” is among the ten most frequently used. Research has shown that these therapies (often called “mind-body-spirit techniques”) can help decrease anxiety, diminish pain, strengthen the immune system, and accelerate healing, whether by simply inducing the “relaxation response” (and reversing the “stress response” and subsequent impacts on the body, illness, and disease) or, by more complex mechanisms. When patients choose these options, there is often a greater sense of participation in healing and restoration of health and, patient satisfaction is often increased in the process.

It was with this understanding that Women’s Health Services at Hartford Hospital (in collaboration with Alice Moore, RN, BS, Reiki Master and Volunteer Services) began to integrate Reiki healing touch (one of the most well known forms of “energy work”) on the inpatient gynecological surgical unit in 1997. Patients have been very pleased to be offered an option that is so relaxing and helps decrease their anxiety as well as their discomfort. Comments from patient satisfaction questionnaires include “I am so grateful for the pain relief and peacefulness I felt after the Reiki session”, “Reiki was the highlight of my day and I am so thankful to the volunteers”, and “I would highly recommend this program. I feel the Reiki (and guided imagery) helped me recover faster.”

After the tremendous success of this program, the formal Integrative Medicine Program under the direction of Dr. Molly Punzo, M.D. was developed in 2000 incorporating Reiki Pilot Programs (as well as Massage, Guided Imagery, Acupuncture, and Art for Healing) on the Cardiology, Orthopedic, Oncology, and Palliative Care units, as well as in the outpatient Cancer Center. During the pilot phase, outcome measurements were obtained from patients rating their anxiety and pain pre and post Reiki sessions. After analysis by the Quality Management Department, the results not only showed a decrease in anxiety and pain, but a statistically significant decrease regardless of specialty area (see following diagram):

Reiki Outcomes



This was also in line with JACHO's recent focus on offering non-medicinal options for relief of anxiety and pain. More formal research is currently being proposed. Reiki has become an integral part of the traditional medical care on these previous "pilot" units utilizing approximately 60 Reiki Volunteers trained and validated by the hospital. As the word spreads, and as the program is being expanded to other areas of the hospital, the Dept. of Integrative Medicine also receives a growing number of special requests daily.

As mentioned before, although Reiki is relatively new to many of us, it is an ancient hands-on relaxation and healing technique dating back several thousands of years, rediscovered in Japan in the 1920s. Here are some of the most frequently asked questions:

What is Reiki?

Reiki is a Japanese "hands-on technique for stress reduction and relaxation that also promotes healing. It is based on the concept that everything in the universe is made up of energy and this "life force energy" that flows all around us is drawn in by the body nourishing the cells, organs, and glands. This same energy also radiates from the body and is called the human energy field. When one's energy is depleted, imbalanced, or the flow is restricted by stress and "holding", injury, illness, etc., one is more susceptible to discomfort, further illness, and disease (as with restrictions of the circulatory and nervous systems). When one's energy is restored, free-flowing, or balanced, one is more likely to feel relaxed and the body's own innate healing abilities are "jump-started" and utilized for healing. According to research done as early as 1930 by Dr. Harold Burr from Yale, disease (imbalances) can be detected in the energy field before symptoms and can be altered by altering the vibrational frequency of the energy field. This was not well accepted at that time but is becoming more widely recognized.

What does Reiki feel like?

Although Reiki is "hands-on", unlike massage, it is administered through a softer touch rather than a deeper pressure. While the patient is seated or lying down and fully clothed, the practitioner's hands are placed along energy centers and pathways on the head, neck, chest, abdomen, legs, and feet (similar to those used by acupuncturists). As energy is transferred to the body, the patient may feel warmth, coolness, gentle tingling, or just deep relaxation. For those in the final stages of life, it can also provide a more peaceful "transition."

What are the benefits?

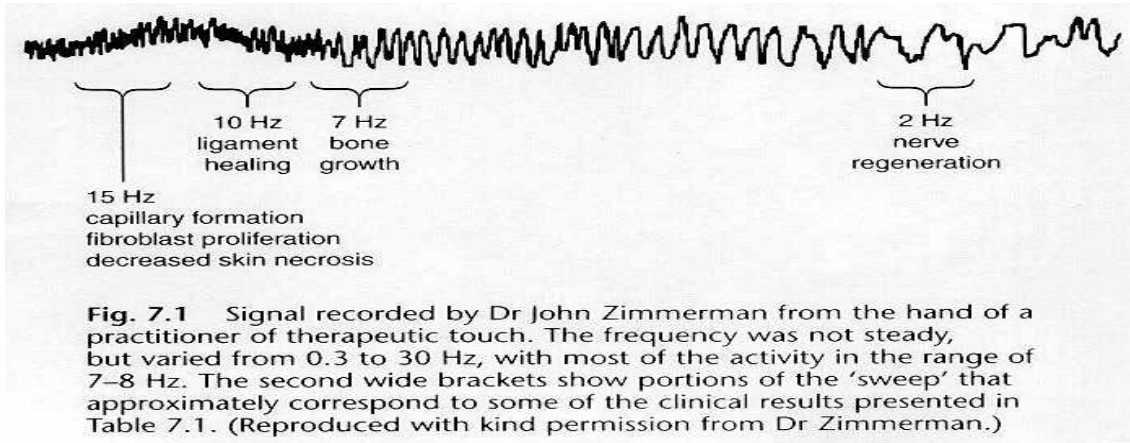
Research on various types of "energy work" has shown that, in addition to deep relaxation, there can be a reduction in muscle tension and pain, accelerated wound healing, and a greater sense of health and wellbeing. It is useful during illness, after injuries, pre and post-op, as well as for health promotion. The patient does not need to believe in the process but only needs to be receptive to experience benefits.

Who can learn?

Anyone can learn - the ability to tap into the universal "life-force energy" is not dependent on intellectual capacity or belief, only a desire to offer comfort. "Hands on healing techniques" are often approached with a spiritual perspective and yet, based on basic physiology, can be approached very neutrally. The human body is designed in such a way that whenever we touch someone with the *intention* of offering comfort, there is automatically an energy exchange. Research and measurement of energy flow from a trained practitioner's hands has shown that when the practitioner is in a meditative, healing state (centered, relaxed, with clear **intention**, "present" for the patient's highest good) there is an even greater flow of energy.

Based on this concept of energy flow and "intention," using the SQUID magnetometer, Dr. John Zimmerman of the University of Colorado Medical School has been able to measure not only a difference in the vibrational frequency coming from the non-trained and trained practitioners' hands, but from the

trained practitioners, a range from .3 Hz to 30 Hz. The most frequent measurement observed was 7-8 Hz (the vibrational frequency found most often in nature in harmony and in the music that research has shown to be the most healing). This research was also later confirmed in Japan. This range of frequencies correlates with the varying vibrational frequencies of healthy tissues and organs. The range also incorporates the frequencies used in the electromagnetic treatment equipment now being used in traditional medicine to accelerate healing in bone, skin, etc. (see following diagram from *Energy Medicine, a Scientific Basis* by Dr. James Oschman).



Since energy flow in the body is not an easily understood or accepted concept, a personal experience or the ability to measure and document is certainly helpful, especially for the more skeptical mind. In addition to the magnetometer, Kirilian photography (a Russian discovery) can help us see the energy emanating from the body, show us how it changes with stress, thoughts, emotions, etc., and as the following diagram conveys, specifically show the energy from the hand:



Although we are beginning to measure energy fields and energy transference, the mechanism for Reiki and other “hands-on” techniques is still uncertain. Since the practitioner’s hands are placed over the energy pathways used by acupuncturists, is there a release of endorphins as in acupuncture? Is there a release of nitric oxide since cells in which nitric oxide is produced are influenced by energy fields? We’ll have to wait and see. Until recently, alternative and complementary therapies including “energy work” were felt to be too mysterious, confusing, and controversial to be approached scientifically. Now science and energy practitioners are discovering similar results. However, waiting for the research does not change the fact that patients are seeking healing options such as Reiki and giving us very positive feedback.

Being hospitalized is rarely a patient's first choice. However, having access to skilled physicians and staff, as well as the opportunity to integrate additional healing options such as Reiki (Massage, Acupuncture, Guided Imagery, Art for Healing, etc.) into their care, can sometimes be life enhancing for our patients and help them feel calmer, more comfortable, more empowered, and more in control during a very stressful time for them. Although modern medicine has tended to focus more on the physical aspects of healing, we are coming full circle learning that healing is more holistic when we incorporate these "mind, body, spirit techniques". Jeffrey Migdon, MD in the "Alternative Advisor" very concisely summed it up by saying "The face of healthcare is changing...moving toward a more open-minded view of nonconventional remedies...some new, some long forgotten."

References

1. Barnett, Libby, and Chambers, Maggie. Reiki Energy Medicine: Bringing Healing Touch into Home, Hospice, and Hospital (Vermont: Healing Arts Press, 1996).
2. Benson, Herbert, MD. The Relaxation Response (New York: Avon Books, 1997).
3. Eisenberg, David, MD, et al. "Trends in Alternative Medicine Use in the United States, 1990-1997." *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997.
4. Gerber, Richard, MD. Vibrational Medicine: New Choices for Healing Ourselves (NM: Bear and Co. Publishers, 1996).
5. Olson, Karin, RN. "Using Reiki to Manage Pain: A Preliminary Report." *Prevention and Control en Cancerologie*, 1997: 1(2).
6. Oschman, James, PhD. Energy Medicine: The Scientific Basis (NY: Churchill Livingstone, 2000).
7. Pert, Candice, PhD. Molecules of Emotion: the Science Behind Mind-Body Medicine (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1999).
8. Wetzel, M. RN, MSN. "Reiki Healing: A Physiologic Perspective." *Journal of Holistic Nursing*. 1998: 47-53.
9. "The Efficacy of Reiki hands-on Healing: Improvement in Spleen and Nervous System Function as Quantified by Electrodermal Screening." *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, 1997: 3 (4) 89.

The Hartford Hospital Dept. of Integrative Medicine is available for consultation and educational presentations. For more information, call Marcia Rothwell, LMT, Program Coordinator at (860) 545-4444, email itherapies@harthosp.org, or visit our website at www.harthosp.org/intmed

Alice Moore, RN, BS, Reiki Master-Teacher (a former ICU Nurse Manager), was involved in the initial development of Hartford Hospital's Reiki Program, is currently the teacher and coordinator for the Integrative Medicine Dept., and can be reached at (860) 545-4308 or aimoore@harthosp.org. She also has a private practice offering Reiki, Therapeutic Touch, Craniosacral Therapy, and Guided Imagery for surgery preparation.