

RADIOFREQUENCY ABLATION FOR LUNG CANCER

VOL. 4 NO. 10

THE BIWEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE FOR RADIOLOGIC SCIENCE PROFESSIONALS

MAY 12, 2003

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REIKI

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REIKI

Rising Star in Complementary Cancer Care

BY KATE JACKSON

When Nancy Sampson, RN, BS, was preparing to retire from hospital nursing, she wanted to work with one of the hospital's general practitioners, who was opening a retreat for cancer patients and who encouraged her to learn a biofield therapy known as Reiki (pronounced RAY-kee). "I sort of rolled my eyes, but I thought, OK—I'll try it," she recalls. "Of course, everyone was rolling their eyes back then; but, I had a phenomenal experience when I was first initiated into Reiki, and I knew at once that there was something to it." She went on to become a Reiki master and teacher, and for the last seven years has coordinated a volunteer Reiki program in the radiation oncology department at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (DHMC) in New Hampshire. Her experiences have validated her initial enthusiasm, and she's certain that Reiki not only helps cancer patients retain and receive energy to heal, lessens the disease's symptoms, and mitigates the side effects of treatment, but it also frequently extends lives.

Reiki—a mind-body healing therapy—is helping ease patients' debilitating cancer symptoms and treatment side effects at some major cancer care facilities.

Barbara G. Smith was equally skeptical. When her sister, a holistic and conventional veterinarian, invited her to take a Reiki course, Smith declined. "She kept after me, and I said, 'I'm not interested; I don't know what it is; I don't have time.' But, she wouldn't leave me alone," she remembers. "Finally, because my husband and I both had Lyme disease, I thought if it could possibly help, why not try it?"

The course transformed her life. "I absolutely loved it," she says. "All I wanted to do from that point on was use Reiki to help people." Smith also became a Reiki master and teacher and is unwavering in her conviction that Reiki is a powerful complementary therapy for use with traditional modalities when healing sick patients. "I'd love to see it used—not just in a few isolated facilities, but in every hospital—along with other complementary and alternative therapies so that patients and doctors can work together to heal the whole person, not merely treat symptoms."

nel energy. Only a master teacher who has reached the highest of three levels of training can train students. Level 1- and level 2-trained students, however, are capable of giving Reiki to themselves and others. Level 1, which is typically accomplished in a two-day period, is effortless, energizing, and at the same time extraordinarily relaxing. Level 2 training, which can also be accomplished in two days, enables the recipient to access more healing energy than level 1 through the use of mantras and symbols. Level 3 master training, the duration of which depends on the Reiki master, provides even greater access to healing energy through the use of additional mantras and symbols.

During Reiki sessions, a clothed patient reclines on a massage table or Reiki table with pillows beneath his or her head and knees. Often, relaxing music is played. During a treatment (lasting from 20 minutes to 90 minutes), Reiki practitioners float their hands above or place their hands lightly on specific energy centers of the body. Using 12 to 15 hand positions, they transmit Reiki to

professionals have not only been intrigued by Reiki, but many have also recommended it to their patients; and a surprising number have learned Reiki and employ it alongside their conventional healing practices. More surprising is that, in advance of rigorous investigation and research, Reiki has been embraced and legitimized by leading hospitals that offer it as a complement to traditional treatments.

This reception, however, is hardly surprising to those who've tried Reiki. Practitioners and recipients alike claim that the therapy can promote natural healing, stimulate endorphins, lessen or eliminate pain, lower blood pressure, reduce heart rate, alter hormone levels, promote deep relaxation, energize, and have a calming effect. The American Cancer Society acknowledges patients' subjective reports that Reiki speeds healing, increases physical and spiritual well-being, and reduces the intensity and frequency of nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy. While many practitioners firmly believe that it shortens hospital stays, decreases patients' need for medica-

At Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, Reiki is offered to improve quality of life and help relieve the symptoms of cancer in a state-of-the-art, integrative medical center. "It's been an incredible tool here," says Wendy Miner, LMT, massage therapy manager and Reiki master, who's been practicing Reiki for approximately 13 years and teaching it for eight years. "I find it helpful for the gamut of concerns of the cancer center population."

A GENTLE HEALING FORCE

"Reiki is a gentle, noninvasive, yet powerful energy that's wonderful used alone or in combination with conventional or holistic care," says Smith. The word *Reiki*—from the Japanese words *rei*, meaning universal, and *ki*, meaning life force energy—describes a healing and stress-reduction technique believed to be rooted in ancient Tibet. It's believed that it was rediscovered in 1914 by Dr. Mikao Usui, who, legend has it, was a Buddhist monk in Kyoto, Japan, who—based upon his extensive research—developed what has come to be known as the Usui system of Reiki. Hawayo Takata, a disciple of Dr. Chujiro Hayashi, Usui's successor, introduced Usui Reiki to the West in the 1930s. Most of today's Reiki masters trace their lineage to the 22 masters trained by Takata.

Many Eastern cultures embrace the concept of universal energy (*ki* in Japanese; *prana* in Sanskrit; *chi* or *qi* in Chinese) and believe that physical, spiritual, or emotional distress results from an energy blockage. With Reiki, the practitioner is believed to channel energy to the patient and restore balance.

To practice Reiki, an individual must be trained and "attuned," or initiated, to chan-

the patient. Reiki practitioners neither diagnose nor promise outcomes. Nevertheless, they believe Reiki to have innate wisdom, be spiritually guided, serve the highest good, and flow naturally to wherever an individual needs it most.

Although many believe Reiki to be spiritual, it is not a religion, and it does not require those who give or receive it to adhere to any religious dogma. Recipients, Smith explains, have different reactions. Some initially feel nothing, while others may "experience a floating sensation, drift off to sleep, or feel a glowing radiance flowing through and surrounding them," she says. Most, she says, will have a sense of profound relaxation.

WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS

Reiki can be a difficult concept for medical professionals to fathom. The terms often used to describe it can be alienating to those who speak the language of hard science and statistics. Its mechanisms and efficacy have not yet been measured or validated in a conventional way; its practitioners are neither trained nor credentialed in the rigorous manner familiar to most clinicians; and its premise strikes many as implausible or insubstantial. Nevertheless, healthcare pro-

cessions, minimizes the side effects of treatment, and improves quality of life, none suggest that Reiki is a substitute for medical diagnosis or conventional treatment. They maintain, however, that because it has no potential for harm and no contraindications, it's an attractive complementary approach appropriate for all interested patients.

While evidence of Reiki's effectiveness has, until recently, been largely anecdotal, it has been compelling enough to inspire the beginnings of ambitious research. The National Center for Alternative and Complementary Medicine (NCCAM) is investigating the use of Reiki in the treatment of HIV and diabetes. Researchers at the University of Saskatchewan, under a grant from National Cancer Institute of Canada, are exploring the use of Reiki to combat the side effects of chemotherapy and anxiety in breast cancer patients.

Not everyone sees Reiki in terms of energy. Researchers at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) in New York City view Reiki as a form of light-touch massage and are studying it alongside more traditional forms of massage to determine the effects on symptoms common in cancer patients. The initial findings of a retrospective analysis of

clinical follow-up data, including 1,200 patients, was presented last June at the American Society of Clinical Oncology. "We ask patients to rate their symptoms before and after treatment," says Wendy Miner, LMT, massage therapy manager at MSKCC and Reiki master. "Some patients were also called one day later and two days later and asked if the symptoms increased or stayed low and to what extent."

What the study revealed, she explains, is that the symptoms patients described as being most bothersome usually decreased by 50% after a single treatment and did not return to pretreatment levels during two days of follow-up. There were no important differences in effect between Reiki and the various other forms of massage. Miner is quick to point out that MSKCC massage therapists have given many thousands more episodes of massage care than those followed in this study. Though not at all surprised by the results, they were encouraged to have preliminary data to support their impressions of significant clinical benefit from massage therapies. A randomized trial of Reiki for the treatment of pain is slated to begin at MSKCC in the next few months.



Image courtesy of Smith

Barbara G. Smith, Usui Reiki master and teacher, performing the therapy many cancer programs—such as MSKCC, DHMC, Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, Bassett Healthcare's Louis Busch Hager Cancer Center, and the Yale Cancer Center, to name a few—to offer Reiki.

requires nothing of the patient but a willingness to participate, and because it naturally flows to the need—whether that be mental, physical, emotional, or spiritual. At MSKCC, says Miner, patients rate their pain, fatigue, stress, nausea, and depression, and Reiki has been helpful in relieving all of these symptoms.

For example, the most common side effect of chemotherapy and radiation expressed by many cancer patients is fatigue. "With radiation," says Miner, "the first two weeks might be OK, but at some point, the patients seem to hit a wall of fatigue. These patients say they're really tired, and they can be people who are go-getters and have never felt tired like this before. In the past, if they didn't get a good night's sleep, they might have eaten better or exercised to feel better. But, this is not the kind of fatigue that can be relieved by any of these activities." During Reiki, patients often rest deeply, and when it's done, they feel comfortable, Miner explains. "It makes them feel as if they won't be tired for the rest of their lives," she says. After a Reiki session, agrees Smith, "The patient is energized and able to do things that he or she didn't believe were possible—perhaps

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THE CANCER CONNECTION

Michael McCarty, a level 2 Reiki practitioner, and his wife, Susan, a Reiki master from Salem, Ind., relied on Reiki when Michael was diagnosed with cancer in 1999. Daily practice reduced the pain of surgery and allowed him to endure 37 radiation treatments with relative ease and no side effects. "I don't know how it works," he says. "All I know is that it worked for me." Michael's enthusiasm for Reiki garnered the support of his radiologist, who told him that he was "all for anything to keep you emotionally and mentally stable while going through something so threatening to your body."

Despite the scarcity of hard data confirming Reiki's specific benefits, this kind of positive patient response has prompted

At MSKCC, for example, Reiki is offered to improve quality of life and help relieve the symptoms of cancer in a state-of-the-art, integrative medical center. "It's been an incredible tool here," says Miner, who's been practicing Reiki for approximately 13 years and teaching it for eight years. "I find it helpful for the gamut of concerns of the cancer center population." It's considered so beneficial, in fact, that it's the subject of regular inservice programs, so that all hospital staff can learn more about it and incorporate it. "Medical professionals who take the time to learn Reiki add a powerful dimension to their practice," says Smith.

Reiki is a particularly attractive tool for cancer patients, says Smith, because it

going to a child's school play or to the grocery store. It gives patients energy when they need it, allows them to relax when they most need it, and lets them sleep better than they would without it."

At DHMC, Sampson, a nurse in the outpatient clinic, has trained and coordinates 10 volunteer Reiki practitioners who treat patients in a dedicated Reiki room within the radiation oncology department. It's a peaceful oasis, she says, where ambulatory patients love to come to receive Reiki. For those who can't visit the room, the team of Reiki volunteers follow them throughout the hospital for the duration of treatment. For the first seven years of Sampson's Reiki program, there was one practitioner per patient.

Now, based upon an ancient Japanese model, there are two practitioners per patient. Explains Sampson, a Usui Reiki master who also has a private Reiki practice in Quechee, Vt., "The patient will receive no fewer than five days of Reiki sessions because we have discovered that some do not respond or feel anything until the fifth session." For radiation patients who require as many as eight weeks of treatment, Sampson tries to ensure that they get at least two weeks of Reiki therapy and, when possible, receive Reiki straight through until the end of the radiation treatment. The goal, observes Sampson, is not to cure cancer. "We're trying to heal—and healing is done with the patients' minds," she says.

According to Miner, another common problem for cancer patients is anxiety. "When people are in the hospital, they're in a foreign environment," she says. "Our patients are not here because they're a little sick. They're here because they're very sick, and often, they're scared. They may be having 24-hour chemotherapy infusions, and their bodies are having responses." Cancer patients may always be thinking "What if?" and "What do I do if this happens?" According to Miner, they relentlessly "think, think, think—worry, worry, worry." Reiki, she says, often triggers the relaxation response, enabling them to effectively reduce those thoughts. "It gives them a reprieve for a time," she says, "so that they're not consumed by the burden of those repetitive thoughts." Adds Sampson, with Reiki, "Despite the diagnosis, patients don't feel like they're at the end of the world."

Other stress- and pain-reduction methods, such as massage, may be inappropriate for patients undergoing radiation because their skin can become extremely sensitive. "The integrity of the uppermost tissue level is compromised, so we can't do massage," explains Miner. Massage therapists also cannot manipulate patients on radiation sites that overlay tumors, but they can easily perform Reiki. "We can lightly rest our hands on the affected area without applying any pressure and without creating any alarm," she says.

"Reiki is not esoteric," says Miner. "It's basic, simple human communication. You lay your hands on someone and align yourself; you offer your best intentions for this person, and you encourage them to think of it that way." The patients, observes Sampson, "say 'I feel so centered, so comfortable, so peaceful.'" Their pain, she suggests, is diminished, and many patients with terminal conditions have extended their lifetime by receiving Reiki.

In addition to ameliorating cancer symptoms and treatment side effects, Reiki comforts terminally ill patients. "When I make house calls on patients who are

dying, I see what Reiki does for them," says Sampson. "If I go to the hospital rooms of dying patients, I see the peace that surrounds and embraces them. They say they feel more calm, clear, energized, and centered, and are at peace."

EMPOWERING THE PATIENT TO HEAL

"Reiki provides medically proven flexibility in treating and supporting the patient as a whole," explains Smith. One fact that all medical and healing modalities agree upon, she says, "is that a person's attitude and stress level have a pronounced effect on the healing experience. Reiki allows patients to tap into an energy source that reduces or eliminates pain and stress, so that the body has more energy to heal itself."

Because receiving Reiki was so beneficial to patients at MSKCC, Miner concluded that her program should expand, to teach and attune patients to self-administer Reiki as well as train caregivers to provide the therapy. "I had a number of patients who came weekly for sessions, but I thought it would be great if they could use it every day at home as a relaxation tool, so that if they awakened in the middle of the night with anxiety, they could use it to help them get back to sleep," she says. Her team at MSKCC, therefore, offers anyone—patients, staff, and community members—the opportunity to learn Reiki levels 1 and 2.

The goal, agrees Sampson, is not to hold on to patients, but to teach them. "Then they can do it for themselves, and that's a key part of healing," she says. "The majority of patients take that route and find it extremely helpful." When teaching Reiki, she tells patients in advance that they may not feel anything for a month. "I tell them not to have any expectations," she says. "But, more often than not, people who are taught Reiki feel something right away." They might feel a sensation of warmth, coolness, tingling, or pure peacefulness; see vivid colors in their minds; or experience a rush and release of emotion.

Learning and self-administering Reiki, says Smith, requires nothing from a person but willingness to participate. "If patients become attuned to Reiki, they are empowered to take responsibility for their own health and gain control," she says. "Although they can't control where the Reiki goes, they can put their hands on themselves whenever they want." The healing and restorative powers of touch are well known, she observes, "but the addition of Reiki takes it to a whole new dimension."

— Kate Jackson is a staff writer at **Radiology Today.**

Reiki Hands Around the World

One way that Reiki is finding its way into the worldwide community is through a project that is the brainchild of Usui Reiki master/teacher Barbara G. Smith of Doylestown, Pa. Smith had been taking a Landmark Education course that required participants to create a project of any scale that impacts the community. After 9/11, Smith became determined that her project would contribute to spreading the word about Reiki and envisioned global ramifications.

She devised Reiki Hands Across the World, a grassroots project by which Reiki practitioners (level 1, 2, or 3) are "invited to take Reiki into communities that touch their hearts," whether those communities be comprised of 9/11 victims or survivor groups, older adults, children, or animals. The Reiki practitioner may then enroll other Reiki practitioners to participate in a healing circle in which one or more practitioners administer Reiki—one person at a time. This healing circle may occur once or on an ongoing basis.

"The people in the community may have never heard of Reiki before, so this gives them an opportunity to experience how healing it is," says Smith. To keep this energy going, the recipients—in return for Reiki—are asked to do an act of kindness to someone they normally wouldn't have. Smith sees her project as a means through which people might be inspired to "pass healing and kindness forward around the planet—making a difference one person at a time."

Smith invites all of her students to participate, as does her own Reiki master. "One person at a time, it is making its way out into the world," she says. "I'd love to see it go all around the world because it does make a difference." She hopes to have a project Web site soon to share stories and help spread the word.

To learn more about Reiki Hands Across America or describe how you've shared Reiki with a community, contact Smith at 4Reiki@comcast.net.

— KJ