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Mark Cacioppo - 4/24/53
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Gary Owings - 4/26/46
V. Mario Salas - 4/26/46
John Swenson - 4/26/47
Allan Barber - 4/26/50


Reiki: Being used at VA in N.Y.

Reiki is a spiritual practice developed in 1922 by Japanese Buddhist Mikao Usui that uses a technique commonly called palm healing as a form of complementary and alternative medicine. Through the use of this technique practitioners believe that they are transferring “healing energy” in the form of qi through the palms. Reiki is being offered by a growing number of nurses, chaplains and other staffers at New York’s Crouse, Upstate University and the VA Medical Center in Syracuse. About 15% of hospitals nationwide (including the Cleveland Clinic, Children’s Hospital in Boston and Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore) provide Reiki. During a treatment, a practitioner puts his or her hands on, or just above, several parts of a fully-clothed patient’s body. “That energy is going through me to the patient,” said Joyce Appel, a registered nurse and Reiki practitioner at Crouse. “I know it sounds strange.” There’s no conclusive scientific evidence Reiki works. But Reiki proponents point to anecdotal evidence that suggests it eases stress, relieves pain, and can improve a person’s overall sense of well-being. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, a division of the National Institutes of Health, says Reiki appears to be generally safe and no serious side effects have been reported. It also says more than 2.2 million U.S. adults have used it.

Dr. Scott Treatman, Crouse’s director of employee health, said Crouse’s patient surveys suggest Reiki helps patients. Patients were asked to rank their stress levels before and after treatments on a scale of 0 to 5, with 0 being no stress and 5 being high stress. They also ranked their pain before and after treatments. The average patient’s stress score was 2.77 before Reiki and .97 after Reiki. The average patient’s pain score was .99 before Reiki and .78 after. “The evidence, although it’s not in peer-reviewed journals, speaks for itself,” Treatman said. “We’re not only in the business of yanking out gallbladders, but also making the patients’ experience here more comfortable.” Nancy J. Barnum, a nurse practitioner in the VA’s pain clinic said learning how to relax is a key strategy for chronic pain patients. Medication, behavioral therapy and other relaxation techniques don’t work for some patients. For those people, alternatives like Reiki are sometimes more helpful. “If you can help someone to manage their stress level and induce more of a relaxation response, the pain becomes more bearable,” Barnum said.

A few nurses began offering Reiki at Crouse seven years ago. As patient interest in the alternative therapy increased the hospital formalized the program. “Administration said, ‘If patients are benefiting from it, why would we not do it,’” said Bob Allen, a Crouse vice president.

Upstate Medical University has trained about 30 staff members to offer Reiki to patients. There is no formal regulation of training and certification of Reiki practitioners. That has created a credibility problem for Reiki, according to Pamela Miles, a Reiki Master and author from New York City. “Practitioners are all over the board, literally from people clicking on a Web site and considering themselves to be Reiki Masters to people who’ve gone through many years of training,” Miles said. “It’s really a buyer beware market.” She recommends consumers ask practitioners if they have been trained in person by a Reiki Master. Miles also said consumers should ask practitioners about their clinical experience, their fees and — most importantly — whether the provider practices Reiki-self treatment every day.



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