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## Reiki Used for Cancer Patients By LAURA JOHANNES

Reiki, a therapy in which hands are placed lightly on the body or just above it, is increasingly being used to reduce cancer-related fatigue, anxiety, nausea and pain. Several studies suggest a benefit to patients, but scientists say more large, rigorous studies are needed.

Cancer patients—due to the disease and to side effects of chemotherapy—often suffer from severe mental and physical fatigue, doctors say. Anxiety, nausea and pain are also common. In recent years, many cancer centers have been offering Reiki, a form of healing which originated in Japan in the early 1900s, according to scientific literature. In a session of Reiki, hands are placed lightly on the body. Each spot is treated for three minutes or longer and sometimes therapists place their hands just above the body without touching, says Donah Drewett, a Fairlee, Vt.-based Reiki therapist who works at Norris Cotton Cancer Center in Lebanon, N.H.

Extra care is needed with cancer patients. Therapists must avoid sensitive areas on the body such as ports used to administer medications, doctors and therapists say. The gentleness of Reiki is appealing to cancer patients, many of whom are too ill to tolerate a deep-tissue massage, doctors say.

Reiki is often described as a treatment that helps life energy to flow in a patient—an explanation not generally accepted by scientists. Barrie Cassileth, chief of the Integrative Medicine Service at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, calls the energy theory "absurd" but says light-touch therapy can have a "great relaxing effect" on cancer patients "who are constantly poked, prodded and given needles."

Adds Deborah Steele, manager of patient and family support services at Norris Cotton: "How it works is a mystery, but we see anecdotally the amount of "delight" it brings patients.

Some scientists think the benefits may be as simple as the warmth of human touch and the feeling that someone is caring for you. "We do have a reciprocal effect between the mind and the body. If you relax one, you relax the other," Dr. Cassileth says.

At Memorial Sloan-Kettering, treatment for inpatients is available at no extra charge; outpatients pay \$90 to \$110 a session. At Norris Cotton, trained volunteers administer treatments free of charge—often while patients are at the hospital receiving intravenous chemotherapy treatments. Insurance typically doesn't pay for Reiki.

Other centers don't offer Reiki, citing insufficient evidence. "There isn't a good evidence base for its utility in cancer care as of yet," says Lorenzo Cohen, a professor in the departments of general oncology and behavioral science at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

David S. Rosenthal, professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and medical director of the Leonard P. Zakim Center for Integrative Therapies at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, co-authored a January study on Reiki that was published in *Cancer*. The study found twice-weekly, 50-minute sessions reduced anxiety in 18 men with prostate cancer, but the benefit wasn't statistically significant compared with a control group. A larger study is needed to determine if a benefit exists, Dr. Rosenthal says. "The evidence for Reiki is still slim, but there are trends and we have to show whether those trends are real," he says.

A 2004 study of 1,290 cancer patients at Memorial Sloan-Kettering found a light-touch massage, standard Swedish massage and foot massage all helped symptoms including pain, depression anxiety, nausea and fatigue; the study didn't have a control group. In a 16-person study published in 2007 in *Integrative Cancer Therapies*, a team of Canadian scientists found five daily Reiki sessions of about 45 minutes improved quality of life and general well-being reported by cancer patients on a 28-question survey significantly more than resting for about the same period.

Study co-author Linda E. Carlson, a psychologist and an associate professor in the oncology division at the University of Calgary, says she thinks it is possible that a good rapport between the Reiki therapist and the patients could be the reason for the positive result.

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