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Introducing Reiki into the Traditional Healthcare Environment

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THERE IS A FAMOUS PARABLE about an ‘elephant and the blind men or brothers’; many of us have probably read this story as young children and recall how each of the blind brothers thought that he knew what an elephant was by touching one part of the elephant. Each had a partial truth, but believed that his perspective reflected the complete truth about the animal as a whole.

I have been fortunate to work in healthcare environments in which multidisciplinary teams are the norm. Even as a young social work intern in Brooklyn, New York, I was assigned to a Family Practice team in which the medical students were to teach me how they viewed the patient’s medical difficulties, and I was to teach them the impact of psychological and social factors on the patient’s health challenges from my perspective. Our unique perspectives contributed to comprehensive evaluations, better patient outcome and a decrease in unnecessary medical interventions.

Since moving to Tucson, Arizona over 30 years ago, I have been blessed to work with compassionate and dedicated oncology medical teams that have learned to embrace Reiki as a healing modality for our patients, families and staff. Other Reiki practitioners often ask me how I have cultivated this acceptance and have been able to ‘grow’ our successful Reiki out-patient program. The following is some of our history and story.

In June 1999, I was first introduced to Reiki for my personal healing through our integrative medicine program; I had been suffering from some type of progressive neurological disorder as well as from a rotator cuff tear that would not heal. I began to work on myself daily following my first Reiki training and attunement in August of that year.

I never planned on becoming a Reiki practitioner or a teacher. However, as my health improved, it became ethically impossible not to introduce Reiki into oncology care. I started to share information with staff about the benefits I received from using Reiki and began educating them about Reiki as a healing modality. I shared with them how one neurological symptom at a time was improving. My head no longer felt like it was going to explode as the persistent headaches began to recede. The facial numbness started to decrease. My memory became clearer, and I could better recall names and pertinent information. I could walk without feeling as if I was struggling through sludge. As my fatigue dissi-


ated, new hope and energy took its place. My rotator cuff tear finally began to heal, and I could sit, move and exercise without pain and restrictions. My gratitude about all these improvements was overwhelming! Whenever it was appropriate, I would give patients the contact information about Reiki practitioners in the community. Within two years my confidence had grown, and my conviction about Reiki was unshakeable; I had also advanced in my Reiki training. In one multidisciplinary team meeting I asked my colleagues how they would feel about me offering Reiki to their patients who desired assistance with stress management and relaxation; to my surprise, there was little discussion and instead a ‘why not’ type of attitude. It was now time to engage the staff further by inviting individuals to schedule a brief, 10–15 minute Reiki session with me during lunchtime. Whether the individual was a physician, nurse, receptionist, radiation oncology therapist or physicist, the response was wonderful!

Over time, it became very natural for staff to refer patients or families in distress for Reiki. They would also come to me for personal assistance with grief issues, sports injuries and other physical and emotional concerns. Years later whenever I would teach a Reiki class in the Cancer Center, I would invite one staff person to take the training.

Since I work with such a diverse group of very scientific-minded professionals, I recently thought that it would be fascinating to explore what each person’s perspective was from the point of view of his or her discipline regarding what Reiki is, how it works, whom it is most effective for and the role of Reiki in each of my colleagues’ own lives. I handed out feedback forms and looked forward to collecting and reviewing this information. Even though only some responses were returned, the perspectives weren’t as different as I had anticipated. There was a convergence into a fairly unified whole. Each person clearly recognized that Reiki was ‘deeply relaxing,’ comfortable and restorative. Some thought that the Reiki helped to release negative energy or emotions, replacing it with more positive energy. Each recognized that this could be very valuable to cancer patients and family members who frequently experience stress related to the cancer diagnosis and treatment needs. Some responders had already taken Reiki training with me and had been using Reiki to provide for themselves a sense of peace and re-balance, especially after a challenging day. Some expressed the desire to take Reiki in the future.

Any discussion about multidisciplinary teams cannot be complete without adding the patient's perspective; I have always considered the patient as one of the most important persons on the treatment team. One of my Reiki students was very kind to reflect upon and share with me her experience with Reiki. She first came into our clinic for a consultation in 2007 following her diagnosis of breast cancer and told her physician that she was a 'natural kind of woman' and preferred holistic or alternative approaches. This physician immediately told her about Reiki being available to her and introduced her to me. She was thrilled to know that she could integrate Reiki into her traditional oncology care. She decided to schedule weekly Reiki sessions on Wednesdays in our clinic for the six weeks that she was receiving radiation oncology treatments. Her experience was that the Reiki helped her to: maintain her energy and positive attitude, avoid feeling fatigued and sleep better. She felt certain the Reiki even helped to minimize side effects from the treatment including any skin reactions. The day after she completed her radiation treatments, she, and her husband, took a Reiki Level I training with me, which was co-sponsored by a community grant. Even though as a couple they were also dealing with family grief issues related to her mother-in-law's death, they found that if they put their

hands over each other's crown chakras, they would 'relax and even laugh together.' This wonderful and dedicated student has since gone on to take Level II Reiki training with me and is a strong participant in our Reiki shares in the Medical Center and Energy Circle in the Tucson community. She has also worked with me in Touch of Reiki programs including at our hospital benefits' fair, Partners in Survival programs, nursing events, community baby fairs and in-services and presentations to integrative medicine, cardiac and transplant groups. She has also inspired numerous other cancer survivors to take Reiki training and to use it to navigate more holistically on their own cancer journeys.

In summary, if your journey as a Reiki practitioner includes the opportunity and desire to integrate Reiki into a traditional healthcare environment, remember that the perspectives of multidisciplinary team members about Reiki may appear in time quite similar. Present your convictions and experiences about Reiki from the heart, with integrity and with clarity. Recognized on some deep level, we all want peace of mind, healing, wellness and 'positive energy' for ourselves, our clients and those whom we love. 

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