

New research shows Reiki aids the wellbeing of cancer sufferers

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As a new study shows that at least half of the population will get cancer at some point in their lives, a University of Huddersfield research project claims that the complementary therapy named Reiki can improve the quality of life for cancer patients by lowering their levels of anxiety, depression and fatigue. The findings are to be presented at a major conference and larger-scale research could follow.

The project was named An exploratory study of Reiki experiences in women living with cancer and it was conducted by Dr Serena McCluskey, who is a Senior Research Fellow in the University's Centre for Applied Psychological and Health Research and Professor Marilynne Kirshbaum. They were joined by Dr Maxine Stead, who has an academic background in [psychosocial oncology](#) research and is now the owner of a holistic health spa in Huddersfield.

She is herself a practitioner of Reiki, a Japanese technique in which the hands of a healer are said to release positive energy. There is scientific controversy over Reiki, but the University of Huddersfield researchers were purely concerned with its potential to bring about improvements in wellbeing.

They have concluded that "Reiki could be a beneficial tool in the self-management of quality of life issues for women with cancer". The team now believes that there is a case for Reiki being added to the roster of complementary therapies that are available via the NHS.

"Acupuncture and other techniques that were regarded as quite unorthodox are prescribed on the NHS, so we just thought that more research on Reiki was needed," said Dr McCluskey. "We are not suggesting that we can establish scientific effectiveness, but we are adding to the body of evidence for the quality of life benefits it has for women with cancer."

Detailed interviews

Over the course of a year, the researchers conducted detailed interviews with ten women who had received Reiki therapy at two hospices in the local area. They discovered benefits such as a release of emotional strain, "a clearing of the mind from cancer" and feelings of inner peace and relaxation.

The benefits could last for as long as a fortnight, said Dr Stead. "It really gave them an escape from what they were going through. They were often undergoing a lot of treatment, and the Reiki was a respite and seemed to help them cope. It got them out of their blackness."

Dr McCluskey and Dr Stead, who is now a Reiki Master, were colleagues at the University of Leeds in the Psychosocial Oncology Research and Clinical Trials Unit – largely funded by Cancer Research UK – where they researched quality of life issues.

"Due to more effective methods of diagnosis and treatment, people are living longer with [cancer](#) and it is now often classed as a long-term condition. "Patients don't go into the hospital or see consultants as frequently, so they often look at things outside of normal medical treatment to help them cope with the effects of living with the disease, such as depression, anxiety, fatigue and pain," said Dr McCluskey.

Pilot project

The findings of the pilot project are to be presented in a paper at the 2015 conference of the British Psychosocial Oncology Society, taking place in Leeds (March 19th-20th). The researchers plan to publish their findings and also hope to expand their work.

In addition to the fact that Dr Stead is a practitioner of Reiki at the Alexandra House Health Spa in Huddersfield, her fellow researchers have also experienced the therapy and report the benefits, although not on a scientific basis.

"We are aware of criticism from the empirical evidence about the validity and credibility of Reiki and so we did a scientific literature review on the subject. We will publish the findings of that," said Dr McCluskey.

Dr Stead added: "We don't know exactly how and why birds migrate to the other side of the world and come back to the same place every year. But one day we might be able to – and the same goes for Reiki."

Provided by University of Huddersfield

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