

Reiki in Cancer Centers and Beyond

BY BEVERLY VAUGHN, PHD

THE DOCTOR SAYS those dreaded words: “You have cancer.” You sit still at first in shock. Next, they read the results with a neutral tone reserved only for hard news. Then, they take you into a room to meet the team you never agreed to join for a sport you don’t know how to play. Eventually, they bombard you with information about oncologists, radiologists, chemo infusions, and surgeons. Finally, they make your appointments—bone scan, MRI, and bloodwork. As you try to follow the prologue of this journey, voices seem to recede to Charlie Brown’s teacher talk—“Wah, Wa Wa.” You don’t have the slightest clue about the cost or the conditions to pack for.

My journey following that first conversation began with three rounds of biopsies for HER2+ breast cancer status tests. Then a lumpectomy, followed by a re-excision, followed by a mastectomy, followed by a port insertion. I spent the following year going from treatment to treatment—first radiation, then chemotherapy, then on to the targeted drugs. I’d get to one finish line only to start another race.

I remember them scheduling my mastectomy for the first week of the new school year, so I went in a week early and videoed my first few weeks of lessons for my classes. I wanted the kids to see me doing well, and I didn’t want to lose those first weeks of rapport-building with my new 6th graders. When I returned, I remember being genuinely concerned about how my students would respond to watching me undergo chemotherapy, especially losing my hair, which was crazy, right? Because as far as the chemotherapy—no problem. But having to explain the hair loss to a room of 12-year-olds? Anxiety through the roof!

During this time of what felt like a constant emotional roller coaster, I re-engaged with energy medicines. I started with Reiki but delved into qigong, EFT tapping, and meditation. As I explored, I shared many techniques with my students, which, as young singers and actors, proved to be great



for correct diaphragmatic breathing, performance, testing anxiety, and overall well-being. It was 2009, so “integrative medicine” was still very much “alternative.” Qigong provided excellent techniques for breathing and muscle tone. It helped me keep my energy going and allowed my body to tolerate the various treatments I had to endure. I used EFT tapping to help mediate my anxiety. Finally, I used Reiki to send positive intentions to each bag of chemo used.

In 2017, I retired from 30 years of teaching and decided I wanted to “pay it forward” to my cancer community. I became certified in Reiki by an ICRT teacher and slowly built-up hours of volunteer work with many people. I also became a certified EFT tapping clinician and took several classes in Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and Breathworks Mindfulness, for which I led meditations. Then the pandemic happened. During this time, I realized there was even more need for these integrated methods that had helped me so much, so I took classes and became certified in Holy Fire® III Karuna Reiki® and ICRT Animal Reiki with an ICRT teacher.

Two years ago, a nonprofit organization called Hirsch Wellness Network allowed me to teach Reiki online with cancer patients, survivors, and caretakers. It became such a blessing to interact with my cancer community that I still teach classes and

lead Reiki meditations with this organization. The programs are all free. They offer courses in various artistic mediums, Reiki, Tai chi, yoga, EFT tapping, meditation, swimming, and much more. It is a fantastic organization, and partnering with them has been a pleasure over the past few years. Good energy, and a desire to relax and heal, fill my Reiki classes. In addition, everyone gets to participate in group Reiki shares, where you can send Reiki out or receive it. All can take part, from beginners and up. Here are some comments from participants:

“Learning Reiki has meant so much to me. I was recovering from cancer after chemo and radiation; I had no energy and could barely get out of bed or move around. Dr. Beverly performed Reiki on me, and I got up for the first time in months. I have taken Reiki classes and helped my granddaughter and others have relief from severe pain. I am so thankful for all the times I have been in pain and have been sent Reiki by class members and individuals to remove all my pain. I have also sent Reiki to other countries and people in other cities.” —Linda, NC

“I am grateful and blessed to have learned Reiki through the Hirsch Wellness Network. Beverly Vaughn’s teaching of Reiki uplifted me through a difficult pandemic period. Because of her classes, I became certified and can give Reiki to my family and friends.” —Barbara, MD

“The Hirsch Reiki classes, as guided by Beverly Vaughn, have given me a greater understanding of the physical and life energy around us and my capacity to assist in my body’s nurturing and healing. Beverly’s gentle guidance, as she leads participants in Reiki experiences, reminds us of the constant positive influences at work in our lives when we learn to tap into them.” —Margaret, NC

“Reiki procedures have created a buffer between my anxieties or pain for temporary relief, a distraction for mind and body to breathe deeply in a peaceful, restful state. I also love the fact that this energy is done in a circle of like-minded practitioners, our Hirsch family, each willing to share their positive healing energies, whether in our Zoom windows or through a linked (virtual or actual) touching of hands in a magical circle of wishful healing vibes. How could you not want to receive and give all you can, sharing our love of life with others?” —Bob, NC

One of the other things I am most proud of in this important work was being asked by an American Sign Language interpreter to make a video to explain Reiki to the deaf community, which is an often-overlooked group of people. I wanted to make sure this community at the cancer center knew I was there for them. So, my dear friend Elaine Montgomery and I made a video and presented a short program about Reiki for the Communication Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CSDHH). I hope to continue to serve the deaf community and that they continue to have beautiful experiences with Reiki.

In addition, I volunteer at the Cone Cancer Center in the infusion room. The nurses and staff work hard to keep patients supported and cared for. After a year, they offered me the chance to give Reiki, one-on-one in the cancer center, to patients, survivors, caretakers, nurses, and staff through the Alight Integrative Care Program managed by Lauren Somers, MSW, LCSW, OSW-C. She hopes to expand this offering to three other hospital cancer centers in the area. This program is donation-based, but we hope more people will recognize the importance of Reiki and other integrative medicines in hospitals all over the US. It has become an essential tool to many similar to me who have benefited from adding integrated therapies like Reiki to our overall patient care. ■

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Beverly is an Usui/Holy Fire® III and Karuna Reiki® Master Teacher, an ICRT Animal Reiki Master, a certified EFT tapping clinician, and a Breathworks Mindfulness for pain and anxiety coach. She offers Reiki sessions and teaches online and in person. In addition, Bev volunteers and teaches cancer patients and survivors at the Hirsch Wellness Network, provides Reiki sessions at Cone Health Cancer Center, and is a co-founder of the Apis Collective, a supportive group for Reiki practitioners and teachers working with cancer patients and survivors. She has a PhD in music education and taught for 30 years in public schools and 43 years privately. Bev’s current passion is giving and teaching Reiki! You may reach her at bjsvaughn@gmail.com.