

National

Reiki goes mainstream: Spiritual touch practice now commonplace in hospitals

By Brianna Sacks | Religion News Service

May 16, 2014

CHATSWORTH, Calif. — Sandra Delgado wasn't held much as a child growing up in a stern, Catholic, Mexican-immigrant home in the San Fernando Valley.

A high-stress job and spiking blood pressure led her to discover the healing power of human touch a year ago when she walked into her first Reiki session.

"Reiki saved my life," said Delgado, a lawyer with Bank of America. "I cannot live without it and I don't want to know what would have happened to me if I hadn't found it."

A spiritual touch practice based on the notion that human hands can redirect one's "life force energy" to heal stress and disease, Reiki is the hottest new Eastern healing practice making its way into the Western health industry.

Like acupuncture, yoga and other once fringe practices, Reiki is now viewed by many as an effective, accepted alternative practice in mainstream America, where at least 1.2 million adults have tried the energy healing therapy.

But for a relatively safe and side-effect-free treatment, Reiki has garnered quite a conflicted reputation among health researchers and medical professionals and in the Roman Catholic Church.

"Overall there is a lack of high-quality research on Reiki, and the studies that have been done show conflicting results," a National Institutes of Health report found.

Findings also conclude that there is "no scientific evidence to prove that such energy exists," writes John Killen from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

Yet, the energy healing is being woven into patient services and treatment programs for people with cancer, fibromyalgia, pain and depression. American consumers like Delgado have been paying out of their own wallets for Reiki, which can range from \$40 to \$300 a session, creating a new touch therapy market that hospitals, medical and cancer centers are tapping into.

"People come to me when nothing else is working," said Marydale Pecora, founder of Param Yoga Healing Arts Center in Chatsworth and a longtime Reiki master who works with Delgado and hundreds of others. "It's a last-ditch effort to get relief from a medical challenge and to restore balance."

More than 60 U.S. hospitals have adopted Reiki as part of patient services, according to a UCLA study, and Reiki education is offered at 800 hospitals.

The Healing Touch Professional Association estimates that more than 30,000 nurses in U.S. hospitals use touch practices