

every year. Pecora said hospitals now seek out Reiki masters and do workshops to train nurses and medical staff. More medical professionals are signing up and paying about \$175 to go through Reiki levels 1 and 2, she said. Training programs to become a Reiki Master Teacher last six months to a year and cost \$875.

Yet many medical experts question Reiki's lack of regulation, especially in a hospital setting.

Reiki critics call the practice "quackery" and unable to ameliorate symptoms of serious diseases. According to a 2009 article in *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, "The serious methodological and reporting limitations of limited existing Reiki studies preclude a definitive conclusion on its effectiveness."

In 2009, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued guidelines that say "a Catholic who puts his or her trust in Reiki would be operating in the realm of superstition."

The guidelines say it would be inappropriate for Catholic institutions, such as Catholic health care facilities and retreat centers, to offer Reiki.

Despite the criticisms, Pecora said she can walk into all major hospitals in the San Fernando Valley to conduct Reiki sessions without anyone batting an eye.

"It just works," she said. Pecora has been practicing Reiki since the 1980s, when energy healing was considered "unique, weird, and no one knew what you were talking about."

At a recent Saturday afternoon Reiki share session, strangers gathered together to work out energy kinks.

Pecora quietly moved through the circle of folding chairs, conducting "attunements." Her thin hands fluttered across people's bodies. She blew on the crowns of heads and faces, her breath like steam, soft and odorless as participants focused on realigning and opening the energy channels.

A 2008 American Hospital Association survey found that 84 percent of hospitals reported patient demand as the primary rationale in offering complementary medicine services, including Reiki.

Laura Zempel, a palliative care nurse at Ventura County Medical Center, summed up the core argument: Reiki has a placebo effect.

But, she added, the medical center has plans to offer Reiki sessions because patients keep asking for it.

Demand helped create the Integrative Medicine Wing of the Roy and Patricia Disney Family Cancer Center in Burbank, Calif., four years ago.

"Patients are much more demanding for these practices. It's the reason why our whole department came about in conjunction with Western medicine," said Vanessa Ortiz, the wing's program director.

The hospital has a contract with a local Reiki master who comes once a week to conduct private sessions with patients. She charges \$40, half her normal rate, and says she cannot wait until insurance covers her services.

Health insurance companies cover Reiki when it's woven into comprehensive treatment programs such as physical therapy, massage or palliative care and delivered by a nurse or licensed care professional as part of routine care during a