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Reiki in a Hospital Setting

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WHEN I FIRST VOLUNTEERED to offer Reiki treatments at a local hospital in 2010, I did not know it would lead to a full-time paid position as an associate in their Integrative Medicine Department (IM) for the following ten years, but that's exactly what happened. My background in holistic health made the transition easy. I have been practicing and teaching Reiki since 1993. Additional training allowed me to offer breath work, guided imagery, and acupressure treatments to patients. I speak Portuguese and Spanish—a plus since the hospital serves Portuguese and Hispanic communities. Referrals were initiated by nurses, doctors, social workers,

patients, or patient families. I met patients with illnesses and conditions that I would never have seen in my private practice. On any day, I might offer a Reiki treatment to a woman in active labor, an anxious patient right before surgery, a bariatric patient post-op, one patient having a dialysis treatment, a patient on a ventilator, or patients in the locked Behavioral Health Unit. We often referred to our department as small but mighty. I was one of only two providers offering services in all units on two hospital campuses. After treatments, we recorded our visits in the patient charts. We also logged all our sessions and kept annual statistics. In 2019, for example, the two of us saw

2830 patients in both hospitals. Of those patients, 1108 received Reiki treatments. In 2018, we saw 2914 patients and 924 Reiki treatments were given. The youngest patient was three days old and the oldest 102 years old. Practicing Reiki in a hospital has been the highlight of my Reiki career. In this article, I will share some personal anecdotes about my patients' Reiki experiences and some things I learned along the way. Patient names and a few details have been changed to maintain anonymity.

Being Reiki

Patients loved the warmth and comfort of "Reiki hands," but that is just a part of Reiki practice. People experience Reiki from their whole being; Reiki is in us and surrounds us, filling the entire space. So, whether we are practicing a hands-on Reiki treatment or just sitting with someone in need, our Reiki presence affects everyone.

John was hospitalized for heart problems. He was anxious about testing and what the doctors might find. He was curious about Reiki and agreed to a treatment. Before I even started, he said, "Thank you." I asked him, "For what?" He answered, "For being here."

After the Reiki session, he expressed how peaceful he felt. John's sister was seated in a chair across from his bed during the treatment and commented, "I've been so worried about my brother, but now I feel so much calmer. It felt as if you were giving the Reiki treatment to me too." When I stopped in the next day, as soon as I walked into the room, both the patient and his sister said they felt better.

Reiki and the Terminally Ill Patient

Charlotte, a 50-year-old woman with terminal cancer, spent a month in the hospital. I saw her every day that I worked and enjoyed the time we spent together. She described Reiki as a blessing, which made her feel calm and relaxed during an exceedingly hard time for her and her family. Her pain medications couldn't be increased, and Reiki helped to ease her pain.

After a few weeks, Hospice was called to make her as comfortable as possible as she got ready to die. Finally, on the morning of the day she passed away, I entered her room and found her alone.

Charlotte was lying in bed with her eyes closed. I took her hand and started offering Reiki, and she opened her eyes for a moment, smiled, and gently squeezed my hand.

Then she closed her eyes and kept them closed as I sat by her side for two hours until her family arrived. They thanked me and commented on how peaceful she seemed.

The Healing Power of Touch

I always asked patients if they were okay with physical touch. Very few said no.

Mark told me he lived alone and had grown accustomed to solitude. Yet, he was so grateful for Reiki touch. He said, "The importance of touch cannot be overstated. I am so grateful for Reiki and the human connection it has given me."

Many elderly patients told me they hadn't been touched since their spouses died.

Millie was 86. Her husband had died eight years earlier. During her first Reiki treatment, she cried gently. She said the warmth of Reiki touch made her remember her husband's hugs. I asked if she wanted me to stop. She said, "Please don't. I feel like he's here with me. It makes me sad, but so happy to remember him like this."

Interruptions

My Reiki treatments were often interrupted even when I put a sign on the door that a Reiki treatment was in progress. A doctor or social worker might need to see the patient after I started a treatment. I would excuse myself and then continue after they left. The break never bothered the patient. Every once in a while, a doctor would say, "I'll come back. What you are doing is more important."

Just for Today, Don't Worry

There were often noises from the hallway or the other patient in the room had visitors or watched television. At first, the noises bothered me because I worried that my patient wouldn't relax. The following story shows how I stopped worrying.

My patient was in the bed by the door of a double room. The other patient was out of the room for testing. We were about ten minutes into the session when the door swung open, and the other patient was wheeled in. Unfortunately, there was only a narrow space for the bed to pass. The bed banged into my patient's bed three times. The transporter apologized and continued wheeling her in. He also spoke to her in a loud voice because she was hard of hearing.

I continued the Reiki treatment and watched my patient, thinking she would open her eyes and complain

about all the commotion. Instead, to my surprise, she kept her eyes closed, and her breathing remained calm. After 15 minutes, she opened her eyes and told me her headache was gone, and she felt wonderful. I asked if all the noise bothered her. She replied, “What noise?”

Reiki Treatments Can Change the Perception of Pain

Some patients’ pain levels decreased significantly. Other patients told me their pain level before the session was a 10 (using the VAS scale, 10 being the worst) and continued to be a 10 after the Reiki treatment. They also said they felt so relaxed after Reiki, the pain level was tolerable.

One of those patients, Mary, suffered from chronic pain. However, during the Reiki treatment, she felt as if she were away on a camping trip, so relaxed that the level 10 pain didn’t bother her.

Not All Results Are Evident Right after a Treatment

Since I wasn’t always able to see patients more than one time, I might not hear about the benefits they received later that day or week. However, these are two patients about whom I heard.

I saw a patient early one morning. He was feeling anxious and readily agreed to Reiki. After the treatment, he felt relaxed and thanked me for stopping by. Later that day, I was walking down the hall. As I passed his room, he called out, “Miss, miss. I urinated. I urinated right after you left. I’m so happy. Thank you.” This may sound like an odd thing to be so happy about, but in his case, it was significant. He hadn’t been able to urinate since his surgery. The nurse was going to catheterize him that afternoon. He was delighted that he did not need the catheter inserted. Over the years, many patients experienced the same relief after a Reiki treatment.

I visited Robert at his doctor’s request. He had metastatic liver cancer. His pain medication was not helping, and he needed some relief. Robert told me that “this junk” (i.e., Reiki) never worked for him, but he was willing to try anything. His right hand was numb, and he couldn’t feel his fingers. He could only move his pinky finger. His right shoulder hurt, and he couldn’t lift his arm.

When I finished the 20-minute Reiki session, I noticed Ray was opening and closing his right hand. He said there was no numbness, and he could feel all the fingers for the first time in months. Then he lifted his arm to his shoul-

der and gave me a high five. He said, “This ‘junk’ is better than any meds they’ve given me.” His pain level went from a 10 before the Reiki treatment to a 1 after. I was glad he felt better, but he didn’t tell me how significant moving his fingers was to him.

A few weeks later, I saw Robert’s doctor and asked about him. She told me he passed away the week after I saw him. She shared a little of his story. He was a biker all his adult life, and he hadn’t been able to ride his motorcycle for a few months because he couldn’t move his fingers. The week after the Reiki treatment, he took his last ride.

From Shaking to Relaxed

I offered Reiki to several patients in active withdrawal. Jane’s body was shaking from alcohol withdrawal. She was very pale. After about ten minutes of Reiki, her body was calm, and her face glowed. The transformation was remarkable. I remember thinking she looked ten years younger. Her nurses were amazed at the difference Reiki made. Jane thanked me and said, “You took the darkness away.”

As I held a three-day-old baby in my arms suffering from neonatal abstinence syndrome, her body shook and twitched. It was heartbreaking. But to see her relax and fall asleep from just a few minutes of Reiki was heartwarming.

Sleep at Last

Mary hadn’t slept since she was admitted to the hospital the day before. She had a collapsed lung, and a chest tube was inserted. Medication wasn’t easing the pain or helping her to sleep. Her nurse asked me to offer her a Reiki treatment in the Intensive Care Unit. After a few minutes of Reiki, Mary fell fast asleep and stayed asleep for four hours. After another Reiki treatment later that day, she slept for six more hours.

Phoebe was hospitalized with severe asthma. After her Reiki session, she said she could breathe easier. The next day, when I saw her, she said she slept better that night than she had since arriving in the hospital three weeks earlier.

No Words Needed

Many of the patients spoke no English. I used an interpreter to introduce our services. After Reiki, translation wasn’t usually necessary. Sofija, a Macedonian patient, looked at me with tears in her eyes, smiled, and kissed my hands. I received lots of those smiles and hand kisses over the years!

Empowering Patients

I couldn't teach hands-on healing to my patients, but I could share aspects of Reiki practice like breathing meditation, The Reiki Precepts, and even chanting with the symbol mantras. Depending on what the patient's concerns were, I shared a technique.

Bob was referred to the IM department for anxiety. He was anxious about an MRI scheduled for the following day. I taught him to breathe deeply into his *hara* (abdomen). I explained how slow and steady breathing into the *hara* could help him relax.

The next day, I stopped by. Again, he said the breathing technique worked. He focused on abdominal breathing during the MRI and felt relaxed throughout the test.

My Thoughts

Practicing Reiki in a hospital was a humbling experience. I saw patients with pain, anxiety, and trauma daily. I met families coping with the illnesses and deaths of loved ones and saw nurses and doctors offering hope and healing.

Not only did I offer hands-on healing to my patients, but also the Reiki spiritual principles that guide me in my personal practice: humility, non-judgment, gratitude, centeredness, and compassion.

I always begin a Reiki session by saying what my Reiki Master, Frans Stiene, suggests, "I ask that you receive whatever you need at this exact moment in time." By doing this, I let go of expectations. Being present and offering Reiki is enough. No intentions, no directing energy, no ego. The recipient gets what he needs, not what I want.

Over the years, I saw some patients get their first good night's sleep since arriving at the hospital, others relaxed and were pain-free. Some thought Reiki was the best thing they ever experienced, some laughed it off as nonsense, and at least one patient took a last motorcycle ride.

I was privileged to witness the healing possibilities of Reiki practice in a hospital that understood the value of integrating conventional care with holistic practices. I hope Reiki practice in hospitals soon will be the rule, not the exception—as common as aspirin, just as Mrs. Takata imagined. I hope all Reiki practitioners are a part of that growing Reiki presence. ❄️

Do's and Don'ts of Reiki Practice in Hospitals

1. Don't place hands in *gassho* or wave hands above the body.
2. Don't make extraordinary claims or guarantee specific results.
3. Don't offer psychic impressions or speak of angels or Reiki guides.
4. Don't talk to patients about energy blocks.
5. Do explain Reiki in simple terms and refrain from using new-age terminology.
6. Do always keep your eyes open during a session.
7. Do let patients know Reiki is not a replacement for medical treatment.
8. Do commit to Reiki self-practice for your well-being.



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