

Center for Reiki Research Study Summary

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The Effects of Reiki Therapy on Pain and Anxiety in Patients Attending a Day Oncology and Infusion Services Unit

Reference

Birocco, N., Guillame, C., Storto, S., Ritorto, G., Catino, C. et al. The effects of Reiki therapy on pain and selected affective and personality variables of chronically ill patients. *American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine*, Published online 13 October 2011
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Purpose of Study

To investigate the role of Reiki in the management of anxiety, pain, and global wellness in patients with cancer with various stages of disease and attending a day oncology and infusion services unit.

Objective/goals/hypotheses

To measure changes in anxiety, pain and overall well-being (global wellness), in cancer patients receiving any kind of chemotherapy for any stage of the disease, after Reiki treatments administered in a day hospital setting.

Methods

Study participants were self-selected after having received explanation about the Reiki technique and giving written informed consent. A maximum of four 30-minute Reiki treatments were administered during 4 chemotherapy (CT) infusions; the practitioners held their hands above the patient or gently touched his or her body, from head to legs, focusing on the patient's energy centers (chakra) and sites of pain or discomfort. Patients were fully dressed, sitting or lying, during a day hospital admission. Prior to Reiki treatments, nurses collected the patient's personal data and clinical history: site of primary tumor, date of diagnosis, site of metastasis, number of CT cycles, and performance status according to Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group scores. At the end of the treatment session, pain and anxiety scores using Visual Analog scale (VAS) were recorded together with a description of physical feelings the patients perceived during the session, such as warm/cold, relaxation/stress, well being/discomfort, referring specific sites, if any.

Results

There were 118 participants over a 3-yr period, 57% women and 43% men with a mean age of 55 yrs, all 118 received one Reiki treatment, 48% received 2, 30% received 3, and 17% received 4 treatments. Overall, the sessions were considered helpful to improve well being (70%), relaxation (88%), pain relief (45%), sleep quality (34%), and reduce anxiety (70%). Of the subgroup of 22 patients who underwent the full cycle of 4 Reiki treatment sessions, the mean VAS anxiety score decreased from 6.77 to 2.28 after 4 treatments, and this reduction was statistically significant ($P < .000001$); the mean VAS pain score decreased from 4.4 to 2.32 ($P = .0191$).

Strengths

A potential advancement in noting positive effects on anxiety and pain levels in cancer patients receiving chemotherapy. There was a significant drop in both measures for those patients completing all 4 sessions, as well as qualitative reports of benefits to relaxation and well being.

Weaknesses

The major weaknesses were:

1. Only a subset of patients finished the 4-session study
2. There was no control group, all subjects received Reiki
3. There was no blinding of subjects, data collectors or staff
4. The protocol was designed to take 'all comers' and did not exclude those taking anti anxiety medication or pain relievers.

This study does not follow acceptable research process and methods for rigor in research. The research design is weak and results must be interpreted with caution. Sample bias, blinding issues, and confounding variables detract from this work.

Additional comments

This study does add to the positive qualitative findings of other studies undertaken to examine the effects of Reiki therapy. It also continues the past problems of many studies in regards to the scientific rigor of the study design.

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