

Spirituality & Health

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Energy Medicine Goes Main Street M.D.s and Reiki

If your doctor lays a hand on your back and lingers longer than diagnosis might require, she may be quietly practicing Reiki, a gentle, non-intrusive form of energy healing. Practitioners claim that Reiki is one of the safest and easiest holistic therapies around. The technique, inspired by both Christianity and Buddhism, has been passed from master to initiate since the late 1800s, when it was founded by a teacher at a Christian school in Japan. What's new is that physicians at major hospitals are now taking the practice into their own hands.

At New York's Continuum Center for Complementary Care, pediatrician Larry Palevsky, M.D., uses Reiki on babies and children. "I first began using it in the delivery room," Palevsky recalls. "If a newborn had good vital signs, but wasn't very responsive, instead of slapping him or her, which was the normal procedure, I would lay my hands on the infant for ten minutes or so and just watch him wake up." Now, as a holistic pe-

diatrician, Palevsky often performs Reiki on his pint-sized patients, who are highly responsive to it, he claims. "I don't necessarily wave my hands around or make the announcement: 'I am performing Reiki.' One of the great things about it is that it's subtle."

"Patients can use it for their own self-care," says Pamela Miles, who has launched programs in Reiki at Columbia and Roosevelt-St. Luke's Hospitals in New York.

Those working with patients suffering from AIDS or sickle cell anemia and other under-served populations find it a low-tech method loaded with benefits.

"Students say it builds energy and lessens pain," Miles reports, adding that doctors have noticed it improves the efficacy of other medications a patient is receiving.

But just exactly what does a Reiki practitioner do? The answer is: very little. There are several basic hand placements — on the client's face, neck, head, feet, torso, legs

and back, and no kneading, pummeling, or massaging is required. The Reiki practitioner simply lays on his or her hands, waits, and allows the energy to flow. What flows forth, practitioners attest, is universal life force, a natural healing energy.

The AMA classifies Reiki as merely a "manual healing technique" (no "energy" involved), but they aren't fighting the wave. "Studies show Reiki can be beneficial," says George Kessler, M.D., who teaches at Cornell Medical School and has a practice in New York. "But doctors question whether it's just a placebo effect," since studies have demonstrated that even simple therapeutic touch can reduce the length of a hospital stay.

Whether that energy will ever be observed in the lab is an open question, but more and more doctors seem to agree with Kessler. "Even though we don't know the mechanism, we're happy to see positive outcomes."

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