



Reiki and Nursing

KATHIE LIPINSKI RN, MSN, CH

AS THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY of the beginning of my journey with Reiki approaches (May 20, 1992), it seems a good time to reflect on the two major loves of my life: Reiki and nursing. They have both played a major part in shaping my personal and professional life, often times taking me places I never knew that I would go.

The timeliness of this topic was brought home to me recently when I was asked to present at the Annual Nursing Colloquium at New York Institute of Technology in Old Westbury, New York. The focus of the event was “Alternative Healing Methods,” and I was asked to speak on “Reiki in Hospitals.” As I began to prepare for my presentation, I went back to the earlier articles I had written on Reiki and Nursing beginning in 1997 to see how things have changed and where things are heading.¹ What came to mind once again was how important Reiki is for nurses and how important nurses are to Reiki. Here are some of my thoughts.

Reiki for nurses

As nurses, we sometimes forget that being in a state of health and well-being allows us to provide greater benefit to those we are caring for. Mrs. Takata, who was responsible for bringing Reiki from Japan to the West, often said, “Reiki you first.” She understood the importance of being balanced and caring for oneself, before offering the gift of Reiki to another.

Carolyn Myss, a well-known medical intuitive and healer, has reminded us that we cannot drink from a well if the well is empty. This indicates the importance of filling one’s own vessel first before inviting another to drink from it.² And the old saying “Physician, heal thyself” is also another good reminder of how important it is to take care of oneself so that we can come from our abundance and not our lack.

Nursing is a rewarding profession. Many believe it is a call to service: a desire to help and/or reduce the suffering of others. For many it is not just another J.O.B. When a nurse is a Reiki practitioner as well, their dedication to being of service is often intensified, making them even more susceptible to burnout and stress. Not only can it be stressful to the body (long hours; physical workload; overwhelming responsibilities), it can also be draining on one’s mind and spirit. Being with people every day who are in pain and suffering, dealing with death and dying, dealing with challenging situations can be draining for a person with a compassionate heart. Seeing the worst of the human condition can wear on anyone’s spirit. I remember my days working in Intensive Care: the seriousness of the patient’s condition and the everyday life and death challenges made it feel like we were in a war zone. It was a constant drain on my energy, and the stress eventually led to burn out and what we now know as compassion fatigue. I

wish I had known Reiki back then: it might have prevented me from leaving hospital nursing! Perhaps it could have helped me reconnect with the reason I became a nurse—to be of service.

With the increasing stressors in health care, it is becoming more important for nurses to take care of themselves: to nurture their spirit; to maintain their stamina; to replenish their well. Self-care and maintaining balance in one’s personal and professional lives becomes of utmost importance. What better way than Reiki! Reiki is a wonderful healing system for self-care. It can provide care to the caretaker and is a way for the practitioner to take care of themselves.³ The importance of daily self-Reiki cannot be emphasized enough: it can make the difference between staying balanced and burning out. Giving yourself Reiki for just a few minutes before you get out of bed, when stopped at a traffic light, during a break at work, at bedtime or at any time that you get a few minutes to yourself all contribute to maintaining balance and well-being in your personal and professional lives!

A recent study discussed the importance of a single Reiki treatment for nurses diagnosed with Burnout Syndrome. Diaz-Rodriguez et al. (2011) investigated the immediate effects on immunoglobulin a (sIgA) (an indicator of immune system function), a-amylase activity and blood pressure levels after a 30 minute Reiki or placebo session. The Reiki treatment showed a statistically significant improvement of both immune system function and blood pressure regulation. It also suggested that Reiki treatments could be a cost effective way to manage and prevent job stress for those at risk for burnout.⁴

Bringing Reiki to our working world can be rewarding. But it is important to start with ourselves first. As we give Reiki to ourselves, it automatically radiates out into our energy field causing our clients and patients to feel better just by being in our presence. Being in a state of health and well-being allows one to provide greater benefit to those one is caring for.

REIKI YOU FIRST!!!!

Three minute pick me up

Here is a simple yet effective three minute pick me up to nourish your spirit. It can be done before you begin your work day or during a break, or it can be modified so that you can do it while working, like a moving meditation.

- Find a place where you can be quiet for a few minutes.
- Begin by becoming aware of your breath. You can close your eyes or leave them open. (Depending on how much time you have take 10-25 deep breaths as you do this.)
- Place one or both hands on your power center (solar plexus or 3rd chakra).

- Allow the Reiki to begin to flow. Observe it filling that chakra.
- As you inhale, say to yourself “I fill myself with Reiki. It restores and replenishes my energy.” Or “I breathe in Reiki energy. It restores and replenishes my energy.”
- As you breathe out focus on allowing any tension or stuck energy to release.
- Then move your hands to your heart chakra. Become aware of your breath again, and this time say to yourself: “I fill myself with Reiki. It restores and replenishes my spirit.” Or... “I breathe in Reiki energy. It restores and nourishes my spirit”

This should take you anywhere from two to five minutes and keep you fueled for your work day. And this is not just for nurses—it’s a quick way to keep anyone balanced throughout the day.

Reiki guides us to our true path

It is also important to remember that Reiki began as a spiritual practice to improve and maintain health, to cultivate peace of mind and to enhance our vitality and well-being. The Reiki Ideals were guidelines for living a compassionate life and daily self-Reiki was the foundation of caring for ourselves. Reiki is a meditation for the soul.

Now more than ever, I believe that when we embrace Reiki as a true spiritual practice, it directs our path and guides us towards our true purpose. As Kahlil Gibran wrote in his much loved book, *The Prophet*:

*“And think not you can direct the course of love,
for love, if it finds you worthy, directs your course.”*⁵

This I believe is true of Reiki. When you allow Reiki to direct your course, it puts you where you are supposed to be; it connects you with the right people and puts you in the right place at the right time. As a young child growing up, I always wanted to be a teacher. I would dress up in my mother’s dress, put on lipstick, make up papers and pretend I was a school teacher. It wasn’t until my junior year of high school that I decided I wanted to be a nurse. Now I have come full circle, back to my original dream of teaching by becoming a Reiki teacher and allowing it to guide me in my career. I get the best of both worlds—sharing my nursing knowledge and experience with clients and students as well as guiding them on their Reiki journey.

Why nurses are important for Reiki

According to the annual Gallup poll on honesty and ethics, nurses are the most trusted profession. Nurses have maintained the #1 position for the 12th time in 13 years since they have been included in 1999. The only exception was 2001 after 9/11, when firefighters took first place.⁶

With this in mind, it is easy to see how nurses’ play a very important role in bringing Reiki to health care. With that high a level of public trust, it is easy for nurses to bridge the gap between western medicine and complementary therapies. They can speak the language of both worlds and can guide people in the right direction.

Nurses are on the front line of patient care, so giving Reiki for even just a few minutes can ignite a fire and spread the word. Many hospital and hospice volunteer Reiki programs have been set up by nurses. Some provide the training and supervision. Some provide a foot in the door for other Reiki practitioners to bring Reiki in. Having a nurse to support a program can offer credibility to something that can seem so foreign and different. Nurses can dispel the myths of complementary therapies and educate the public as to their many benefits.

Reiki Research

One of the issues that often comes up when bringing Reiki into a health care facility is the issue of evidence based research. In the past it was felt by some that it may not be possible to research Reiki in a traditional way. This was based on the idea there is no scientific evidence that demonstrates the mechanism for Reiki; what Reiki is and what makes Reiki work. However, we must consider that aspirin was used by medical doctors as an effective medicine for over 60 years before the mechanism for its effectiveness was discovered. In the same way, while we do not yet have a clear scientific understanding of the mechanism that makes Reiki work, there is still value in studying its effects and making use of its value. And while this is true, some still questioned the possibility of creating a double blind system for scientific studies that would rule out the placebo effect. However, current research has proven this to be premature. A valid method of ruling out the placebo effect has been developed involving the use of sham Reiki practitioners who have no energy work training and simply mimic the hand placements used by trained practitioners. In this way well designed studies have been conducted to measure the effects of Reiki on heart rate, blood pressure, heart rate variability, cortisol levels, temperature and other physiological markers. In addition qualitative studies have been conducted that measure relaxation, pain, anxiety and depression. Some hospitals that have Reiki programs in place have already conducted pilot studies and found that Reiki can decrease the length of stay, decrease pain, decrease anxiety and strengthen the immune system.⁷ There have now been 36 Reiki studies published in peer reviewed journals.⁸

Nurses are on the front line and directly involved in patient care on a day-to-day basis and in various settings. They see the pain, the suffering, the anxiety and their effect on the patient’s hospital or testing experience. They know the relaxation and healing that Reiki can bring. They are in a prime position to include Reiki into their routine care as well as to suggest areas of investigation for the use and effectiveness of Reiki.

Friends of mine recently shared some Reiki synchronicities. A Reiki practitioner was attending a hospital fundraiser and a hos-

pital administrator happened to stand next to her. The Reiki practitioner explained what she did as a Reiki volunteer and offered a mini Reiki session. The administrator was so impressed with the experience that she suggested a paid part-time position be voted into the hospital budget (and it passed). In another hospital, a person who worked in the business department had so much anxiety that she could not complete a scheduled MRI; being in the enclosed MRI tube made her feel claustrophobic. She was then given Reiki, fell asleep, and was able to complete the MRI. This person was so impressed that as a result, pilot studies to investigate the effect of Reiki on anticipatory anxiety in relation to reducing costs of incomplete MRIs and other treatments due to anxiety are now being developed.

William Rand, with his work in the development of the Center for Reiki Research (CRR), has done much to contribute to information about Reiki research. The Touchstone Project, a critical analysis of all Reiki research studies published in peer reviewed journals, was a labor of love and was developed as part of a project to determine the current state of Reiki research. This website provides a Reiki practitioner with many resources, including a complete list of all Reiki research studies published in peer reviewed journals along with critically produced summaries of each study, articles about Reiki in hospitals and Reiki research, a comprehensive listing and description of over 60 hospital Reiki programs as well as contact information. All the information on the CRR site is free and is also available in a booklet that can be purchased from the web site.⁹

Pamela Miles also provides a plethora of information and resources for Reiki practitioners on her website.¹⁰ She readily invites anyone to utilize her Medical Papers that discuss Reiki research when presenting Reiki to health care professionals.

Explaining Reiki

As a nurse, I would suggest that when teaching medical personnel, it is important to remember that you are teaching them Reiki: not medicine or how to treat patients. The lay Reiki practitioner might find it helpful to provide an easy scientific explanation of how Reiki works: it induces the relaxation response. Research is readily available on the many benefits of relaxation.¹¹ You can also discuss the benefits of touch in general and talk about how the human body is designed in such a way that whenever we touch someone with the intention of offering comfort, there is an energy exchange. And when the practitioner is in a meditative, healing state (centered, relaxed, with clear intention, “present” for the patient’s highest good) there is an even greater flow of energy.

One of my favorite ways to explain Reiki and how it works is to talk about the work of The **HeartMath Institute** and the effect of positive emotions. Their website provides a plethora of information from their research library on the benefits of positive emotions such as compassion, gratitude and caring, and how it can affect one’s health. (Videos discussing these concepts are also readily available there.)



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Positive emotions, such as love or appreciation, are associated with a smooth, ordered, coherent pattern in the heart's rhythmic activity. Experiments conducted at the Institute of Heart Math have found remarkable evidence that the heart's electromagnetic field can transmit information between people. We have been able to measure an exchange of heart energy between individuals up to five feet apart. We have also found that one person's brain waves can actually synchronize to another person's heart.¹² Obviously, when we give Reiki, we are connecting with our loving, compassionate nature and sharing that with another as well as ourselves. When Reiki fills our energetic field, it is easy to see how it can then spread to another as well as our environment.

Sadly, health care in general moved away from that and focused on treating the symptom, which just addresses the physical aspect of disease and illness. Thankfully with the holistic movement, we are once again looking at our clients/patients as a whole being. Reiki reinforces that as it balances body, mind and spirit. What a gift Reiki has been to me as a nurse to bring me back to why I became a nurse in the first place. And what a way to continue my nursing career as a Reiki practitioner and teacher!



—Kathie can be contacted by email at kathiekaruna95@aol.com.

Endnotes

- ¹ "Reiki and the Helping Professions, Part I," *Reiki News Magazine* (Fall 2006); "More on Reiki and Nursing," www.reiki.org, Fall 2005; "Enhancing Nursing Practice with Reiki," www.reiki.org, 1997.
- ² "Reiki and the Helping Professions, Part I," *Reiki News Magazine* (Fall 2006).
- ³ "Reiki: A supportive therapy in nursing practice," *Journal of the New York State Nurses Association* (Spring/Summer 2003), 11.
- ⁴ L. Diaz-Rodriguez, "The Application of Reiki in nurses diagnosed with Burnout Syndrome has beneficial effect on concentration of salivary IgA and blood pressure." *Revista Latino-Am. De Enfermagem* (2011 Sep.–Oct.) 19 (5):1132-8., www.eerp.usp.br/rlae.
- ⁵ Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1923), 13.
- ⁶ www.nurse.com News, Tuesday, December 13, 2011.
- ⁷ Alice Moore, RN, "Reiki Energy Medicine: Enhancing the Healing Process," Hartford Hospital Dept. of Integrative Medicine, Hartford, CT, www.harthosp.org/portals/1/images/38/reikienergymedicine.pdf, www.harthosp.org/intmed.
- ⁸ www.centerforreikiresearch.org/.
- ⁹ www.centerforreikiresearch.org/.
- ¹⁰ <http://reikiinmedicine.org/medical-papers/>.
- ¹¹ Kathie Lipinski, "Reiki and the Helping Professions: Part II," *Reiki News Magazine*, Winter 2006, p. 37.
- ¹² R. McCraty, R. T. Bradley, D. Tomasino, "The Resonant Heart Shift: At the Frontiers of Consciousness," Dec. 2004–Feb. 2005, No. 5: 17, www.noetic.org/library/magazines/shift-issue-5/2/.

Coming Full Circle

With the general state of health care, Reiki is the way to bring compassion and balance back into hospitals and health care settings. With its simplicity and easy accessibility, it is readily available to patients and health care providers in a multitude of settings. Nurses on the front line of patient care have the perfect opportunity to be the movers and shakers in establishing Reiki in hospitals and as a routine part of patient care.

Reiki brings back compassionate touch and humanizes patient care. By simply asking Reiki to be with you anytime you have contact with a client, it automatically flows and goes to where it is needed and to what it is needed for. Just a few minutes can relax a person and calm their spirit. Reiki touch comforts and can decrease pain. It can also minimize or make tolerable many of the side effects that are a result of various courses of treatment or procedures. Reiki provides a way for nurses and other health care practitioners to stay balanced and healthy. It provides a way to nourish their spirit in an environment often deprived of soul.

When I first became a nurse, the concept of man as a whole being comprised of body, mind and spirit was the foundation of our education. We were taught to look at the biopsychosocial aspects of our patients' disease or condition.

Reiki and other energy modalities are included in the scope of nursing standards in many states and could address issues of stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout. Nurses are increasingly vulnerable to these conditions; Reiki could assist them in healing themselves and helping others. Reiki is a vibrational or subtle energy therapy believed to balance the human body's biofield and strengthen the body's ability to heal itself. Reiki and Nursing By Kathie Lipinski, RN, MSN. Since writing the article on Reiki and Nursing in the Fall 1997 issue, many nurses across the country (as well as England and Australia too!) have written me regarding the use of Reiki in their nursing practice. This article will provide other suggestions as to how Reiki can be incorporated into daily practice as well as current issues facing nurses today. The most important way that Reiki can be brought to any nursing practice is by beginning your day with it.