

Reiki: An Alternative Mode to Healthy Living

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Abstract—In recent years, alternative methods of healing have gained popularity. Reiki is one such complementary and alternative healing modality. Therefore in this paper, a short description of Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is given in order to place Reiki therapy in perspective within the field of alternative medicine. Reiki is the Japanese word for “universal life force energy”. According to Rand (2005), the Reiki energy promotes overall wellness as it flows through energy system of a person. Various researches have also been presented here that has shown the beneficial effects of Reiki on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual level. The review of studies indicates that Reiki offers supportive treatment as more individuals are searching for holistic therapies to alleviate stress and to treat physical and mental ailments. In other words, Reiki is a technique that helps in enhancing the subjective well-being of a person by offering an alternative mode to healthy living.

1. INTRODUCTION

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is a fully accepted and integrated form of health care in many areas of the world and has existed since antiquity (Passarelli, 2008). The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has defined CAM as “a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine” (NCCAM, 2007). The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) further classifies CAM therapies into five distinct categories:

- Alternative whole medical systems (homeopathic and naturopathic, Chinese, and Ayurvedic medicine)
- Mind–body interventions (meditation, prayer, art, music, and dance therapy)
- Biologically based therapies (herbs, foods, vitamins and other dietary supplements)
- Manipulative and body-based methods (acupressure, acupuncture)
- Energy therapies (Reiki, therapeutic touch, and electromagnetic field exposure).

2. REIKI

Reiki is one of the CAM therapies that is increasing in popularity. Reiki is the Japanese word for “universal life force”; “Rei” meaning “higher knowledge” or “spiritual consciousness” and “Ki” meaning “universal life energy” (Lipinski, 2006). According to NCCAM (2007), Reiki belongs to Bio-field medicine that involves system using subtle energy in and around the body for medical purposes. Reiki re-establishes the energy balance in the body parts feeling discomfort, thus, promoting healing and increasing quality of life (Tsang, et al., 2007). According to Rand (2005), the Reiki energy promotes overall wellness as it flows through energy system of a person. These systems can be well described as universal energy field or chakras. The universal energy field is a multilayered field of energy that surrounds and permeates the physical body.

2.1 A Brief History of Reiki

Reiki is an ancient Japanese healing treatment developed by Dr. Mikao Usui in the early 1900s (Brathovde, 2006). Usui was a scholar of religion and a Tao Buddhist from Japan. Reiki draws on martial arts such as Tai Chi and energy cultivation techniques such as Japanese palm healing (Potter, 2007). Reiki was said to be lost until Usui re-cultivated the symbols and the ability to activate the energy on a 21-day fast and meditation on Mount Kuriyama (Whelan & Wishnia, 2003).

Usui began to share his knowledge of healing with others and officially formed Usui Reiki therapy in 1922. He laid out five principles for Reiki (Nielsen- Anderson & Ameling, 2000).

1. Just for today do not worry
2. Just for today do not anger
3. Honor your parents, teachers and elders
4. Earn your living honestly.
5. Show gratitude to everything

Dr Usui continued to teach Reiki until his death in 1926.

Before his death in 1926, Usui imparted his Reiki knowledge and wisdom to 16 Reiki Masters. One among them was Madame

Hawayo Takata. She was the only woman taught by the Usui other than his wife. She became a Reiki Master in 1938 in Hawaii, and continued to teach Reiki until her death in 1980. Madame Takata was credited with bringing Reiki to the western world (Chu, 2004).

Reiki has continued to spread far beyond the teachings of Madame Takata. The Japanese versions and the western versions of Reiki differ to some degree, but both are based on Usui Reiki System (King, 2007). Today groups such as the Reiki Healing Foundation and the American Reiki Association work to educate practitioners and serve as a resource regarding Reiki.

2.2 The Reiki Energy

Reiki teaches that energy is present in all living things, and that a shortage or blockage of this energy results in physical and mental imbalance and illness. Balance can be restored by tapping into the universal source of life force energy” (Epstein, 2001). The practitioner channels ‘Ki’ to the recipient undergoing Reiki treatment. This brings balance in the mind, body, & spirit. The Reiki practitioner does this by lightly placing his or her hands on or just above the body, using a series of hand placements (Herron-Marx et al., 2008).

2.3 Description of Reiki Therapy

Reiki is simple, safe and non- intrusive technique as it doesn't require additional care, diagnosis or medicines. Many other healing methods concentrate on only one aspect i.e. on physical or mental or emotional. Reiki claims to promote healing on all these aspects along with spiritual level. However, it is not associated with any religion, sect or creed. In addition, it claims to promote self-healing and “fuels the body's homeostatic mechanisms & therefore assets the restoration of balance” (Barnett & Chambers, 1996).

Reiki therapy has several advantages over many other types of therapies.

- Anyone regardless of age or circumstances can be trained as a therapist or receive treatment.
- Reiki therapy does not require long years of study.
- Reiki therapy is not intrusive. It does not demand any technology and can be practiced anywhere at any time. Reiki therapy can be received and given either sitting, standing or lying down. However, the preferred position is lying down.
- Reiki therapy does not require the practitioner or recipient to engage in any verbal exchange.
- As Reiki therapies are not intended for diagnosing disease conditions, it does not require a practitioner to collect information.

2.4 The Reiki Symbols

A reported feature that distinguishes Reiki from other forms of energy healing is the symbols that are used in attunement process (Engerston & Wardell, 2002). The Reiki symbols that were discovered by Dr. Usui convey certain meanings to the Reiki practitioner trained in their interpretation and use. In addition, it is claimed that these symbols help substantially in certain aspects such as increase the power of Reiki, bring in the Reiki power, ground the participants, activate the “God” within, and enable distant healing (Stein, 1996).

2.5 Levels of Reiki

First level Reiki: According to Usui Shiki Ryoho, Reiki I is a purely hands on therapy. Students are taught the meaning and history of Reiki, its principles and how it can be used in the student's personal and professional life. Further, it states reasons to use Reiki and it also specifies that Reiki treatment must not be provided unless the potential recipient agrees for it. They learn hand placement positions in a whole body (Baginski & Sharamon, 1988). Students are also taught how to conduct a Reiki session for self healing, family and friends.

Reiki II (second level Reiki): Reiki II uses a set of symbols which can be invoked during hand on work or distance healing. The students learn to heal the emotional and mental levels as well as changing unwanted habits. The students also learn to send Reiki to others over physical distances and learn how to send Reiki energy back in time as well as into the future to achieve goals (Ray, 2001).

Reiki IIIA (Third Level Reiki): In advanced Reiki training, student receives attunement of Usui Master that increases the strength of student's energy. Further, it also increases the effectiveness of Reiki II symbols. Students are also taught psychic surgery to work with crystal grid and goal setting. The students through these various processes and techniques will learn to deal with their intentionality (Ray, 2001).

Reiki IIIB (Master/ Teacher Degree): During this Reiki training, students may be taught the attunement processes for Reiki I, Reiki II, Reiki III A and Reiki Master/ Teacher Training and how to incorporate Reiki Master Symbols into their healing practice (Whelan & Wishnia, 2000).. The attunement is a process of empowerment that opens the crown, throat, heart and palm chakras and connects one to the unlimited source of energy (Gupta, 2004).

2.6 How does Reiki Energy work?

Reiki therapy is administered by keeping hands lightly on different parts of the body on a fully clothed patient. The hands can be kept few inches away from body for about 3-5 minutes at a time. Reiki sessions can last up to 30-45 minutes per session. It can be for long or short durations as per requirement. Treatment can be given to self or others. Reiki therapy treats the whole person that includes body, emotion,

mind, and spirit. It creates many beneficial effects including relaxation, feeling of peace, security, and wellbeing (Bruce, 2001).



Fig. 1: Reiki healing given by the practitioner.

2.7 The Science behind Reiki

Becker et al. (1985) found that not only do the brain wave patterns of practitioner and receiver become synchronised in the alpha state, but they pulse in unison with the earth's magnetic field, known as the Schumann Resonance. During these moments, the biomagnetic field of the practitioner hands is at least 1000 times greater than normal. Bunnell (1997) suggests that the linking of energy fields between the practitioner and earth allows the practitioner to draw on the 'infinite energy source' or 'universal energy field' via the Schumann Resonance. Seto (1992) and Zimmerman (1990) also investigated the biomagnetic field that is emitted from the hands of energy practitioners as they perform healing. They both discovered that pulses coming from the hands of the practitioner are in the same frequencies as brain waves and range from .3 to 30 Hz, focusing in the 7-8 Hz alpha state. Many physiotherapy equipment devices use electromagnetic frequencies in this range to promote bone and ligament healing.

3. SCIENTIFIC STUDIES ON THE PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF REIKI

Reiki is a system of natural healing techniques administered by laying of hands and transferring energy from the Reiki practitioner to the recipient. A placebo-controlled study conducted by Witte & Dundes (1988), is one of the oldest studies located regarding Reiki and other alternative healing modalities. Witte & Dundes (1988) attempted to measure the effects of Reiki on physical and mental relaxation on 100 undergraduate students. Treatments included are Reiki treatment, placebo Reiki treatment, listening to a meditation tape, or listening to music from an audiocassette player. Approximately 20 individuals received treatment at one of the four stations each day for 3-weeks. Pre and post assessment measures were used for Relaxation, Blood pressure and heart

rate. Overall, there was a significant drop in the number of students who rated himself or herself stressed physically or mentally by following treatment. When examined closely, Reiki was the most effective treatment for lowering stress (Witte & Dundes, 1988). Both systolic and diastolic blood pressure decreased and heart rate increased only in the Reiki group.

Wardell & Engerbretson (2001) conducted a study which aimed to identify the effects of Reiki therapy on anxiety and physiological measures of stress. The physiological measures include BP, skin conductance, muscle tension, skin temperature and the biological indicators IgA and cortisol. A total of 23 participants were included in the study. There was no control group and almost all participants received a 30-minute Reiki session. Data were collected in pre- and post-session. Anxiety was significantly reduced, $t(19)=2.33$, $p=.0.03$, however, salivary cortisol was not statistically significant. There was a significant drop in systolic blood pressure (SBP), $F(2,44)=6.60$, $p<.01$. Skin temperature increased and electromyography (EMG) decreased during the treatment, but before and after differences were not significant. Findings suggest both biochemical and physiological changes in the direction of relaxation.

Mackay, Hansen & McFarlane (2004) sought to investigate Reiki and its effect on aspects of autonomic nervous system function. They conducted a preliminary study consisting of a blind trial of 45 participants randomly assigned to three separate groups. Treatment conditions included in 30-minute sessions are no treatment (rest only), Reiki and placebo Reiki. Measures of autonomic nervous system response include heart rate, cardiac vagal tone, blood pressure, cardiac sensitivity to baroreflex, and breathing activity. All measurements were recorded continuously 15 minutes before the treatment, including the 30 minutes of treatment, and then after a 10-minute post treatment rest period. Results showed a significant decrease in heart rate ($p<.005$) and diastolic blood pressure ($p=.005$) in the Reiki group compared to the placebo and control group. Mackay, Hansen and McFarlane (2004) concluded that Reiki has some effect on the autonomic nervous system.

In a study by Bowden et al. (2010), students who had received Reiki demonstrated greater health and mood benefits than those who received no Reiki. 40 university students- half with high depression and/or anxiety and half with low depression and/or anxiety- were randomly assigned to receive Reiki or to a non-Reiki control group. Participants experienced six 30-minute sessions over a period of two to eight weeks. The participants with high anxiety and/or depression who received Reiki showed a progressive improvement in overall mood, which was significantly better at five-week follow-up, while no change was seen in the controls.

Birocco et al. (2012) investigated the role of Reiki in the management of anxiety, pain, and global wellness in 118 cancer patients (67 women and 51 men; mean age, 55

years). Pain and anxiety scores were recorded using a Visual Analog Scale (VAS), together with a description of the physical feelings the patients perceived during the session. All 118 patients received at least 1 Reiki treatment (total number, 238). Reiki found to be helpful in improving well-being, relaxation, pain relief, sleep quality, and reducing anxiety.

Vandergrift (2013) describes the design and initial findings from a 1- year review of implementation of massage and Reiki therapies. Over the course of 1 year, 114 massage sessions were provided to 52 different patients, all of which included Reiki. After completion of these sessions, reduction in pain, anxiety and stress, ease in breathing, and increased relaxation were noticed

4. SCIENTIFIC STUDIES ON THE MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF REIKI

Engelbreton (1996) stated that qualitative research provides experiential descriptions of Reiki, including a sense of awe at the love and compassion received from the practitioner. Reiki practitioners and healers report that emotion releases and the recalling of traumatic events from the past are common experiences during healing treatments. Further by following the healing, it results in a sense of relaxation. Zephyr (1987) suggested that Reiki fosters a perception of safety, calm, peace and healing in clients.

MacDermott (2000) studied the impacts of Reiki and aroma therapy massage on behavioral and psychological change in women survivors of childhood sexual abuse (MacDermott, 2000). She used both qualitative and quantitative measures for analysis. Sixty-four participants chose the therapy that they received. Each participant completed standardized questionnaires and participated in interviews at four points in time before and after each treatment. The quantitative measures indicated that survivors experienced less post traumatic stress symptoms, less intrusive thoughts, decreased anxiety, vulnerability and isolation after nine weeks of treatment of either Reiki or Aroma-Therapy. No significant difference was shown among those who were receiving Reiki or Aroma-Therapy. The qualitative results indicated that both treatments led to decreased headaches and back pain, improvements in sleeping and eating, and more self care (MacDermott, 2000).

5. REIKI IN HEALTH CARE PRACTICES

A medical doctor, Otelia Bengsten, conducted an experiment with a group of 79 patients (Rand, 1998). These patients had a wide range of diagnosed illness including pancreatitis, brain tumor, emphysema, multiple endocrine disorders, rheumatoid arthritis, and congestive heart failure. Reiki treatment was given to 46 patients with 33 controls. The treated patients showed significant increase in hemoglobin values. The effect was so pronounced that even cancer patients who were being treated with bone-suppressive agents showed an increase. The

majority of patients also reported improvement or complete disappearance of symptoms.

Reiki therapy was used in the operating room of the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Centre in New York City. Reiki was used during open-heart surgeries and heart transplantations. None of the 11 patients treated with Reiki therapy experienced the usual postoperative depression. The bypass patients had no postoperative pain or leg weakness; and the transplant patients experienced no organ rejection (Mutz, 1998).

Lewis et al. (2003) stated that several different CAM therapies were integrated in the hospice through volunteer practitioners. No official evaluation has been conducted, but positive clinical outcomes for patients and families such as relief of pain, vomiting, nausea and anxiety have been experienced.

According to the American Hospital Association in 2007, 15% or over 800 American hospitals offered Reiki as part of hospital services. [e.g. St. Lukes Roosevelt Hospital Centre (New York, NY), University of Michigan Hospital, etc].

Reiki has been reported as a starting point for integrative medicine. It is a healing modality that can be taught to patients and family members which gives that patients control and power over their own healing.

6. CONCLUSION

Several researches have demonstrated the positive impact of Reiki on depression, anxiety, cancer and on many other diseases. Reiki is also a spiritual healing technique. It stands out to be one of the most beneficial alternative therapies that bring balance and harmony to body, mind and spirit, restoring a sense of wholeness and well-being. Reiki works on physical, emotional, mental and spiritual level and goes beyond the person to treat the whole person. Thus, the aim of Reiki is to maintain overall health and wellness.

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