What Are the Distinctions Between Reiki and Therapeutic Touch?

Pamela Potter, MA, MSN, APRN

What is the difference between therapeutic touch (TT) and Reiki? When I was asked to write a short article about this question for the Oncology Nursing Society’s PNI (psychoneuroimmunology) and Complementary Therapies SIG Newsletter, I thought the answer would be relatively easy. As I turned the idea over in my mind, the task grew quite complex—requiring focus groups, an extensive literature review, and a multicenter clinical trial to inform an exhaustive academic treatise. Alas, because I am a doctoral student with many other demands on my time, I have opted for a more personal, simple, and speculative description of the difference.

Introduction to Reiki

Reiki, meaning universal life energy and defined as a hands-on spiritual healing tradition (Barnett & Chambers, 1996), has been described as “spiritually directed life energy” (Rand, 1991, p. I-3). It is a system of healing that was rediscovered in the late 19th century by a Japanese Buddhist monk named Usui as he studied ancient texts while praying and fasting (Nield-Anderson & Ameling, 2000). Reiki flourished in Japan and was brought to the U.S. mainland in the early 1970s. Reiki volunteers at Yale-New Haven Hospital in Connecticut and is a doctoral candidate in the School of Nursing at Yale University. She also is coeditor of the Oncology Nursing Society’s PNI (psychoneuroimmunology) and Complementary Therapies Special Interest Group (SIG) Newsletter. This article originally appeared in the September 2002 issue of the PNI and Complementary Therapies SIG Newsletter. Reprinted with permission.

Pamela Potter, MA, MSN, APRN, supervises Reiki volunteers at Yale-New Haven Hospital in Connecticut and is a doctoral candidate in the School of Nursing at Yale University. She also is coeditor of the Oncology Nursing Society’s PNI (psychoneuroimmunology) and Complementary Therapies Special Interest Group (SIG) Newsletter. This article originally appeared in the September 2002 issue of the PNI and Complementary Therapies SIG Newsletter. Reprinted with permission.

Downloaded on 06/17/2017. Single user license only. Copyright 2017 by the Oncology Nursing Society. For permission to post online, reprint, adapt, or reuse, please email pubpermissions@ons.org.