

Reiki Research Review 9

Herron-Marx, S., Price-Knol, F., Burden, B. & Hicks, C. A Systematic review of the use of Reiki in health care. *Alternative & Complementary Therapies* 14(1), February 2008, 37-42.

This issue's research article is a systematic review. That means that a formal study of the literature is undertaken with articles selected according to set criteria, in order to summarise the evidence for or against a topic which has been studied.

The article begins with a description of Reiki, the meaning of the word, a mention of Kirlian photography, and how Reiki is practised. They then move on to the purpose of the study, which is to determine "what the national and international evidence reveals about the use of Reiki in health care". The authors note that Reiki is frequently practised on well individuals rather than concentrating on ill or surgical cases.

A number of database searches were carried out using set terminology, and the authors also searched for unpublished doctoral dissertations and papers. They only searched for studies with primary research and those which included scientific methodologies such as randomisation, measurement tools, etc., articles in English, and those which were conducted in the health care system. 1321 papers were initially identified, 126 were selected and reviewed via abstracts. Full text articles were retrieved for 106 of these, and eventually ten studies were reviewed.

They found papers studying Reiki in the areas of surgery, chronic illness, neurology, stroke rehabilitation, cancer care, cancer pain and mental health. Professional groups which conducted this research tended to be organisations of nurses, psychologists, mental health professionals, medics, rehab professionals and cancer care professionals.

The issue of placebo Reiki was discussed at length. Some studies used placebo Reiki through Reiki I recruits who had been trained but not actually attuned. These people did receive their attunements later. Mostly Reiki II and Master level practitioners were used in the studies.

From their review of the studies, the authors conclude that "our review demonstrates that Reiki has potential as both a treatment modality and an adjunct therapy in health care. However, further research is needed to establish a rigorous evidence base as a platform for the practice of Reiki. This research should be done in all areas of health care in which Reiki is practiced, and should examine its effect on large, matched patient groups over extended periods, using a Reiki intervention standardised according to type, frequency, and duration of practice, with a control group included whenever possible." The authors also recommend that Reiki be assessed not only for clinical outcomes, but also for experiential aspects of the therapy from the patient's point of view.

Commentary

I found this review interesting. It's a perfect summary, albeit of a small number of papers, to present to healthcare authorities and doctors. That said, a great deal more hard research needs to be done. To be taken seriously by funding authorities and bureaucracy, it's important that excellent methodologies are used, and a strong sample of well-matched participants are studied. Well-designed measurement tools need to be constructed. Then it's necessary that the resulting papers are well-written and published in peer-reviewed and respected journals.

We can go on practising Reiki as we have been, but for Reiki to be accepted into the healthcare system, recognised and funded, the evidence needs to be recorded and demonstrable. It's interesting to see how many papers were initially identified, and how many ended up in the review.

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