

# Nurses Lead Revival of Complimentary Therapies at the Stratton VA Medical Center



by Kathryn Crago, RN, HTPA

Two years ago I accepted a nursing position at the VA Hospital in Albany, New York. It was also about the same time I started taking Healing Touch classes. When I talked about Healing Touch with other employees, I was told about a Reiki room that no longer existed and a Complimentary Therapies program that was also gone. People reminisced about a Planetree unit that was here years ago. There was a desire to do energy therapies by some employees who are practitioners, but there was no one doing the work or trying to put together a program. At that point, I would never have thought that I would be hosting an event to present complementary therapies to the staff and patients here.

As fate would have it, I entered the facility in the fall of 2008 with three other like minded nurses -- a massage therapist, a Healing Touch student, and the other a nurse practitioner with endless energy and a passion for the health and well-being of patients and staff. Over the next two years I completed Healing Touch Levels 1 through 4 and have been encouraged along the way by many champions of Healing Touch. This year, after attending the Eastern Regional Healing Touch Conference in October, I was inspired and determined to become a champion myself. 2010 brought a revival of Planetree in VA facilities. This provided an avenue for bringing energy therapies back to the hospital. So I set an intention to do just that.

There have been obstacles and resistance to these efforts, but I reached out to my Healing Touch community and received

support all along the way. I formed a team with my like minded coworkers. The universe provided us a network of supportive people, here at the hospital and in the local community. We coordinated "**The Health Benefits of Complementary Therapies Day**" which was a full day event in the hospital auditorium on December 3, 2010. We offered Healing Touch and Reiki sessions, reflexology and chair massage. I tapped into my local network and brought in three speakers -- an acupuncturist, an integrative medicine physician and a chiropractor. The day closed with a local restorative yoga teacher doing Yoga Nidra. The event was a huge success.

There were six stations for HT, one for reflexology and four stations for chair massage. Not one was idle during the event. We had 150 people attend and did over 90 treatments. The room was alive with vibrant energy the entire day. What struck me most was that even in a climate of fear and resistance, employees and patients alike are eager to explore options beyond what conventional medicine has to offer. Given the opportunity to experience complimentary therapies, they came in droves. Everyone who attended the event was so grateful for what we were doing.

Among the comments by patients and employees were these: "*I realized I had never really relaxed before.*" "*I am so glad I know you. Thank you for doing what you are doing.*" "*This is a wonderful program and should be incorporated into the VA Health Care system. It is very much needed.*" "*Claudia provided a Healing Touch session for me and it set the tone for the whole day.*" "*I loved it. I can't wait for you to do this again.*"

Employees from other divisions of the VA asked if we could help them do something like this. I left that day sensing that this event was just a beginning. Now we are in the process of planning another Complementary Therapies Day in the spring. I am also working with the Planetree Committee to develop a program to provide Healing Touch and other complementary therapies to staff and patients.

I want to commend all the Healing Touch practitioners who volunteered their time that day for their dedication, hard work and professionalism. I think this really speaks to the professionalism and integrity of the Healing Touch Program. I know that I have grown personally and professionally since I entered the program two years ago. I am continually impressed and inspired by the people I meet through the program. As I work through one of my homework assignments for Level 5, I have really expanded my network of local practitioners doing different modalities. This very generous and supportive community has made my own growth and success possible.

After being a nurse for over 20 years, I am more aware than ever of the need to bring compassion and caring back into health care. Healing Touch has provided a way for me to do that. I will continue on the journey and always remember the words of Janet Mentgen, "Just do the work." It hasn't failed me yet.

About the author:

Kathryn Crago, a registered nurse at the Stratton VA Medical Center in Albany, NY, is a Healing Touch Practitioner Apprentice and a volunteer with the Healing Arts Program at Albany Medical Center.

Photos on right: (top) Kathryn Crago giving Healing Touch; (bottom) Liz Stiteler doing chair massage.

