



Spiritist Psychiatric Hospitals in Brazil

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There are about 50 Spiritist psychiatric hospitals in Brazil, utilizing an integrative approach to recovery and stressing the spiritual alongside physical and emotional therapies that address the true causes of imbalance. Energy passes, similar to other Energy Medicine techniques, are central to the healing and health maintenance. This article briefly describes the Spiritist philosophy, its successes, as well as the treatments. Few people outside Brazil know of these hospitals or the more than 13,000 community centers that also offer Spiritist therapies in Brazil. Brazilian Spiritists have practiced combining psychotherapy with energy therapies to hasten recovery for more than 100 years. Perhaps it is time to export some Spiritist wisdom and practical knowledge to help our ailing mental healthcare system in the United States (USA).

How Did I Learn?

I am a psychologist by academic training but began my career as a bodyworker and Neo-Reichian therapist. I now direct the Foundation for Energy Therapies, Inc., a charitable organization dedicated to education and research. Energy therapies have been central to my training and my private practice, as well.

From 2001 until 2012 I spent six months of each year in Brazil learning about Spiritist healing protocols by participating in the activities of a Spiritist center

in Abadiania, a village in central Brazil. I also visited other Spiritist centers and Spiritist psychiatric hospitals in many major cities of Brazil as the guest of their professional staff. I was awed and fascinated by the phenomena I witnessed. I saw many people healing from serious physical and mental issues, including cancer and schizophrenia, without the use of conventional medicine's typical tools—physical surgery and drugs—which are risky. I saw a dramatic display of the positive potentials of healing through the use of meditation, prayer, herbal remedies, peer support, study and receiving personal “energy passes” from highly trained healers who perform a version of “laying on of hands,” akin to Energy Medicine practices here in the USA. I wanted to transmit what I learned to others outside Brazil.

Philanthropic donations supported both my travel and documenting what I learned into four books and two documentary films. Throughout this time, I have often wondered, “Are Spiritist therapies a missing piece in our own healthcare system?” So, I continue to try to build bridges between Western medicine and the unique Spiritist way of healing. Integrative Mental Health for You is a division of the Foundation for Energy Therapies created in 2013. It offers online courses for the public and health care providers who want to learn more about an integrative approach to optimal wellness, similar to what Spiritists offer.



I also lead groups of healthcare providers to visit Spiritist centers in Brazil and learn about the effectiveness of the protocols from the practitioners themselves—who are also associate instructors for the week-long seminar. Participants love to meet psychiatrists and medical doctors who are also working as healers and sensitives in community centers and hospitals—not fettered by the limitations of being academically trained scientists.

My personal interest is not to proselytize Spiritism—instead, to facilitate observations and experiences that may inspire making positive changes in health-care delivery in communities outside Brazil.

up to 40 million people use the services of Spiritist centers in Brazil—about a fifth of the population. The activities include training to become healers as well as classroom study, receiving energy passes, giving and receiving peer counseling, diagnosis by medical intuitives and an unusual treatment that we can liken to exorcism, called “disobsession.” All of these benefits are given for free in the Spiritist centers and people of all ages, sexual orientations, cultural and religious backgrounds are welcomed.

The charge? The centers offer what we would call free complementary healthcare. Even the hospitals are

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Spiritism in a Nutshell

Spiritism is a branch of Spiritualism. The word, Spiritism, was created by Allan Kardec, a French academic, who lived in the mid-19th century. Spiritism refers to a philosophy, really a way of life that includes knowledge of how the world of spirits is in meaningful communication with the world of human beings. Most importantly, it stands for a lively and well-organized path of supporting personal and spiritual evolution.

Spiritists take Christ as an ideal model of being, but, unlike conventional Christians, Spiritists also believe in reincarnation and the impact of karma. They also have no priesthood, no churches nor other accoutrements of conventional religion. Early Spiritualists were simply fascinated with the phenomena of séances and spirit communication and were not invested in personal evolution. Spiritism formalized a more serious, disciplined path of life dedicated to becoming more infused with a consciousness like that of Christ—loving and wise, trustworthy and moral. The numbers of people attending Spiritist activities in Brazil is growing rapidly right now. It is estimated that

in a position to offer free services to the financially disadvantaged for a period of almost a month, but otherwise must charge fees.

Results of Spiritist Healing

If the spirit is not acknowledged as existing and real, psychiatrists will only pay attention to effect. They will be impeded from divining the root causes and will never cure effectively... New theories—with solid experimental foundation—point at illuminating and unveiling the spirit. But, we need courage, not only to acknowledge these theories, but also to examine them.³ – J.L. Azevedo, MD

Even though contemporary research studies are few, unusual successes in healing at the Spiritist centers and hospitals are reported through stories and some academic studies. In April 2004, the President of the Federation for Spiritism in San Paulo (FEESP), Avildo Fioravanti, told me in an interview that FEESP has more than a 90% success rate in helping addicts and the suicidally-depressed to recover normal functioning, without dependence on drug therapy. Social psychologist Canhadas² reported in 2001 that 70% of



clients experience great improvement and a definite cure of their problems, including all manner of physical and mental illnesses, at Grupo Noel, a Spiritist center in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Ivan Herve, MD,³ a psychiatrist, completed a 20-year study in another Spiritist center in Porto Alegre. He reported extraordinary success helping those with profound mental health issues to recover. His study aligns with initial results of a 30+% cure rate documented in the 1930s by Dr. Ferreira⁴ in the first Spiritist psychiatric hospital in Uberaba, Brazil.⁵

Spiritist Treatments and Where to Find Them

There are more than 13,000 Spiritist centers within Brazil and 160 Spiritist community centers in 34 countries outside of Brazil (including 70 in the USA). Few in the USA offer services in English, as most were created by Spanish and Portuguese speakers who immigrated here and wanted to create extensions of their home countries. Whereas 50 Spiritist psychiatric hospitals exist in Brazil, none exist outside the country.

Patients in Spiritist psychiatric hospitals in Brazil can elect to have Spiritist treatments in addition to conventional psychiatric care. Psychiatric medication may be used within the hospital but is not relied on as much as it is in the USA and Europe. Psychotherapy and addiction counseling, various therapies (art, music, gardening and occupational) and outdoor sports are also available. A few of the key practices used for all patients who elect to have Spiritist treatments are laying-on of hands (*passé* in Portuguese), blessed water, prayer and peer support.

Patients with severe problems who are not responding to the above treatments can also have sessions with a medical intuitive (a sensitive person who can see into the subtle and physical bodies through the sixth sense and can articulate perceived problems to benefit the patient and the team of healthcare practitioners attending the patient). These patients may also become the focus of a group of well-trained and gifted sensitives (trained by supervisors to collaborate over decades) who practice “disobsession.” There is no English translation for this word. It involves

sensitives who can first perceive if a person has a spirit attached to them that is generating negative thought forms that the patient believes are his/or her own. Such thoughts might include “Kill yourself” or “Kill so and so” or “You are a terrible person.” These trained sensitives can perceive the spiritual and the psychological relationship that attracted the spirit to connect energetically to the patient—the true cause of imbalances. The sensitives in the group are also trained to help free the patient from the negative “attachments,” a.k.a. “obsessors,” and the obsessive thoughts they transmit.

Each of the Spiritist practitioners donates his/her time at no charge. This can amount from a few hours to more than 40 hours per week—depending on how much time each practitioner wants to donate. They believe that donating their time and attention to help others also benefits their own spiritual evolution as it enhances their communion with our divine source.

Spiritist Laying-on of Hands

The Spiritist healers who practice the passes are trained at the community centers and then either work at these centers or go as a group to the Spiritist hospitals at an agreed upon time, usually twice each week.

The group serving the hospitals will enter a ward of patients at the psychiatric hospital and those patients who choose to participate sit in rows on chairs or in a circle. The healers know the healing protocol and have been taught to interact minimally with patients who might be highly sensitized or in altered states or extreme states of consciousness. The practitioners are asked to have next to no verbal communication or physical contact with patients within the treatment or outside of treatment. Their interaction is focused simply on the healing work and saying an uplifting prayer before the healing begins and after it is concluded within the whole group setting. Blessed water (also energized by laying on of hands) is made available to patients to drink as part of their healing between sessions.



The actual energy work typically involves circumscribed gestures where the healer passes his or her hands 3 to 6 inches above the body of the patient, starting above the head and passing down the body to below the knees. Treatments last only a few minutes per person, during which each patient remains seated, eyes closed, if possible. One at a time, the practitioners of the healing work stand in back or in front of each patient, giving each recipient about 3-5 minutes of concentrated attention.

Each healer focuses on transmitting Divine energy (e.g., the Holy Spirit, Christ's love or the energies

treatments and the calming influence usually lasts for days after the treatment.

Are We Ready for This?

About eight years ago, I went to the largest psychiatric hospital in my state in Brattleboro, Vermont to offer my services for free and spoke to two administrators in leadership positions. I wanted to bring the Spiritist style of "laying on of hands" to the patients who were suffering on the locked addictions ward. I had collected a team of trained healthcare providers and ministers who would come with me to offer the kind of treatment we had seen given in the Spiritist

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coming from highly evolved disembodied spirits or angels) to the patient. To begin, the healer becomes focused, which involves shifting to an inspired state of consciousness whereby the healer perceives himself as a channel through which God's healing energy can flow to the patient. After a prayer to invoke a stream of Divine energy for healing, the dynamic healing then takes place through a continuum of transmission of energy—from the Divine source to the spirit of the incarnate healer and from the healer to the subtle and physical body of the patient.

An observer would see a series of strokes above the body to disperse energies that can lead to imbalance followed by a series of long strokes above the body to enhance the body's self-healing systems. The practitioner sending the pure vibration of compassion and care is considered essential to success. In order to transmit that vibration, the "pass-giver" is continuously involved in "reforma intima" (Portuguese for inner transformation so as to become more loving and wise).

On-site nurses say that patients find peace with the

psychiatric hospital in Porto Alegre, Brazil. We promised to do the healing work in a group for patients who wanted it, under the watchful gaze of the hospital nurses. We promised not to have physical contact with the patients or engage them in conversation or exchange contact information. The hospital refused the offer. No explanation was given other than "it's too unusual."

In Brazil the culture is more receptive to the philosophy and practices of Spiritism. Not so long ago, Brazil was populated with indigenous cultures that believed in the spiritual realms and were well acquainted with subtle forces of energy. When slaves were brought from Africa, they, too, had similar beliefs. The colonists from Europe intermarried with these cultures. Thus the cultures acknowledging subtle bodies and interacting in powerful ways with the spirits began to blend with the more Christian culture of the Europeans. As a result, healthcare practices in Brazil to this day often intermix conventional biomedical care with homeopathy, energy work, use of herbs and accessing the wisdom and love of spirits in a more integrative approach to health maintenance.

The Vermont hospital's response to me might be an indication of how far away our conventional care systems are from bridging to a more integrative approach to mental health care. Despite recent research findings regarding the positive impact of prayer, meditation and laying on of hands, it appears as if there are still very few ways of bringing Energy Medicine practices into psychiatric care in most of our U.S.-based institutions. Hopefully, we will continue to build bridges and construct a practical application of spirituality and energy work in mental health care in the future. €



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