

The Queens Medical Center Premier Healing Touch Inpatient Program

By Carol E. Gutierrez, RN, NP, HTCP, HTP Instructor

Twenty years and going strong - The Queens Medical Center is rich in culture and tradition. This magnet hospital was founded 150 years ago by King Kamehameha IV and his wife Queen Emma to serve the health care needs of Native Hawaiians and all others in Hawaii. Healing therapies and the belief in energy healing is inherent in the cultures of the Polynesian people. Healing Touch is therefore a natural fit as a healing modality for these patients at Queens Medical Center.

Healing Touch was first introduced to this hospital in 1991 by a group of nurses who had completed a Level I class taught by the founder of Healing Touch - Janet Mentgen. These pioneer nurses infused the traditional care of their patients with Healing Touch, to provide comfort and relaxation. Now entering its 20th year, Healing Touch at Queens is still alive and well, providing 2000 Healing Touch sessions a year.

Hob Osterlund, one of the founding pioneer Healing Touch (HT) practitioners, recently retired from Queens Medical Center as an APRN (Advanced Practice Registered Nurse) specializing in pain management. During a telephone interview with me, Hob shared how the Healing Touch program at Queens began and the key components that have made the program successful.

Those nurses who took the Level I with Janet Mentgen in 1991 began by using HT techniques with their own patients. The other nurses on the unit saw the results the HT practitioners were having with their patients, and began asking the HT practitioners to help their patients as well.

As the requests grew, the core group of HT trained nurses knew they could not meet the demands for the requests. A retired nurse, who had also taken Level I, suggested having HT volunteers. Initially volunteer opportunities were limited to nurses, then expanded to all others. Criteria for being an HT volunteer developed into an interviewing process, ensuring the volunteer was aligned with the values of the other HT practitioners and the volunteer had an understanding of what was involved in being an HT volunteer. The volunteer had to present the Level 1 Certificate of Attendance to the interviewing panel. As the program grew, it became clear that creating policies would be the next step. A policy was formally created in 1994.

The Process:

Physician responses: The physicians were surveyed early in the development of the HT volunteer program. One hundred fifty MDs were surveyed in 1994 to elicit whether HT volunteers could see their patients. The physicians could designate whether there was blanket permission, whether the MD must be called each time or whether the physician's patients were not to receive HT at all. Only two of the 150 physicians requested that their patients not receive HT. These physicians later acquiesced as their patients strongly requested to receive this therapy. As with any other modality, the physicians wanted more evidence based support of the therapy, whereas in 1994, this was a new area for research. In Hawaii, the physician is responsible for anything that is ordered - which included the effects of Healing Touch. At the time to allow a therapy that was new was a concern voiced by the physicians. Presently there are several MD services that regularly order HT for reduction in pain, anxiety, relaxation, and comfort. It is free to the patients and produces positive effects.

Key components to the success of this program included support by the nursing administration, the Hawaiian welcoming culture, enthusiastic support of the patients, and dedicated volunteers.

Volunteers: There are 20 volunteers on the list of HT providers, ten of which are very active. The availability of the volunteers determines how many patients can be seen each week.

Screening process: Healing Touch volunteers must have completed Level I HT and have an interview with at least two members of the Healing Touch team.

Orientation: the new volunteer is buddied with a seasoned HT volunteer for about a month or until the HT volunteer feels comfortable working in the inpatient setting. At that time, the volunteer can request to stay with a buddy or work alone.

Giving back to the volunteers: Two educational sessions per year are offered for the Healing Touch volunteers, at no cost, to review Healing Touch methods and to address practice issues. These educational days are provided by a local Healing Touch instructor who is hired for the events. In addition, any volunteer completing more than 70 hours of volunteering services in a year is eligible to have the tuition paid by the hospital for the next level of Healing Touch.

When HT is offered: Healing Touch is offered 4-7 days a week based on availability of the volunteers. A volunteer may see 3-6 patients per day.

Requests for HT: Telephone requests come from patients, families, nurses, physicians and allied health professionals. Orders for Healing Touch are in the computer system and may be placed by anyone who has access to the electronic patient file. In addition, requests for Healing Touch may be made before a patient is admitted to the hospital via a link on the website or a telephone request.

Healing Touch is available in all areas of the inpatient hospital, and in the outpatient radiation oncology area. Patient or parent permission is required before the patient can receive a session.

In vulnerable populations such as adolescents and psychiatric patients, Healing Touch is provided hands-above the body rather than using any direct physical touch.

The sessions are 30 minutes long, unless interrupted at the request of the patient or the need for patient care. Soft music is played during the session. A brief explanation of Healing Touch is presented to patients new to HT. If the patient wishes to learn more about it, there is an informative handout available as well. Goals for the session and an assessment of the pain and anxiety levels are documented before and after the session on the Integrative Therapy Documentation Form. When completed, the form is placed in the chart by a hospital employee.

Study: In the late 1990's a Patient Satisfaction Survey was completed with 200 patients who had received Healing Touch by the same practitioner the day after the Healing Touch session was provided. There was a noted decrease in pain and anxiety after the session and a consistent positive patient response. Healing Touch is also made available to employees twice a week. An email reminder is sent to employees who may respond with a request for a 30-minute session.

Pearls of wisdom to those who wish to bring Healing Touch to their hospital or health care facility: Be patient, accept that the program will develop on its own time, and avoid getting attached to outcomes. Do the work, put in the effort, and allow the process to unfold. There were bumps in the road in the beginning stages at Queens Medical Center that only served to further clarify and strengthen the process and acceptance.

Dedicated resources and an association with an existing department or program that could be responsible for the coordination and leadership for the program is vital. The HT service could be a department of its own, or be part of the general volunteer program, the chaplains program, or pain and palliative care. The culture of the medical center will determine the best fit.

The **volunteers** at Queens are very diversified in background, age, and culture. There are volunteers who have been there a

few months and some that have been there since the beginning. What brings them back is the sense of acceptance and community the hospital provides and, of course, the experience of helping the patients with their healing. They are truly partners in healing with the patients, staff, physicians, and administration.

The Healing Touch volunteer program at The Queen's Medical Center can serve as a template for a successful hospital-based program. Many thanks and blessings to all those who have been part of the development and continued support of this program!

About the author:

Carol is a certified holistic nurse practitioner, certified Healing Touch practitioner, licensed massage therapist, certified guided imagery practitioner, and certified clinical aromatherapist. She is currently working at The Queen's Medical Center as a Cardiac Holistic Nurse Practitioner. In this role she provides wellness and stress management education, as well as provides integrative therapies as part of the complete care to cardiac in-patients. Biofield therapies (including Healing Touch), massage, reflexology, aromatherapy, mindfulness meditation, and guided imagery are offered to the cardiac in-patients at no additional cost to the patients. Contact Carol with any questions at cgutierrez@queens.org