



Healing Touch

An Integrative Therapy in Outpatient Oncology

Debra Reis, MSN, RN, CNP, Program Coordinator - Healing Care, ProMedica Cancer Institute
Tisha Jones, MSW, ProMedica

Hickman Cancer Center at ProMedica Flower Hospital in Sylvania, Ohio, provides comprehensive outpatient oncology services to patients from prevention through treatment and beyond. As the hub for ProMedica Cancer Institute, Hickman Cancer Center served over 3,800 newly diagnosed cancer patients at ProMedica facilities throughout a 27-county service area in northwest Ohio and southeast Michigan during 2013.

In addition to high-quality clinical care, multiple supportive services are provided to patients, including Healing Care. The Healing Care Program provides complementary services that support oncology patients and their caregiver(s) throughout treatment and for two years after treatment. These include group classes - such as yoga, Nia and aromatherapy - and - one-on-one sessions that include Healing Touch, Guided Imagery, aromatherapy or a combination of these therapies. In addition, practitioners often integrate prayer, meditation and/or breathing exercises as part of the session. Practitioners assist individuals with physical, mental, emotional and spiritual concerns, such as lack of energy, nausea, discomfort, anxiety, stress, and/or balance.

The Healing Care Program is staffed by two registered nurses and one licensed practical nurse (approximately one full-time position), who have a variety of holistic experience. All three nurses are trained in Healing Touch and two are certified practitioners; all have aromatherapy education with two completing certification; two have specialized education in

guided imagery; one is educated in Qi Gong and one is certified as a Nia (holistic exercise) instructor. Together, they have over 40 years of experience in providing complementary therapies to patients.

Patients are introduced to the Healing Care Program through a brochure they receive at patient orientation. As part of patient-caregiver-nursing interactions, it is common for the nurses to discuss the complementary services available through the Program. Patients and caregivers can self-refer or can be referred by someone from their healthcare team. In 2013, nearly 600 people participated in group classes and 340 received one-on-one sessions. In addition, over 1,000 patients received massage therapy by an oncology-certified therapist during chemotherapy. This service was provided through a collaborative agreement with The Victory Center.

The Victory Center is a local, non-profit organization whose mission is to support and educate cancer patients and those closest to them by providing individual and group services in northwest Ohio and southeast Michigan. Since 1996 The Victory Center has been reaching out to cancer patients and their families - providing love, support, compassion, hope and laughter. Healing Care practitioners provide weekly services, including Healing Touch and group classes, at The Victory Center. This collaboration strengthens services that benefit people with a cancer diagnosis throughout the community and surrounding areas.



The Healing Care Program has also partnered with a local church and senior center to reach cancer survivors in the community through education and hands-on experience of complementary therapies. Through the partnership with another local church, a two-part workshop was held for survivors in a high-need community.¹ The attendees learned how complementary therapies could support their physical, emotional and spiritual needs and had the opportunity to experience specific therapies that included Nia, art expression, meditation, guided imagery, journaling and aromatherapy.

breast cancer. A third study, which is almost completed, is evaluating the effects of home-based journaling on quality of life in breast cancer patients.

At the inception of the Healing Care Program only Guided Imagery was offered. The program expanded in 2006 with the addition of Healing Touch. Later, aromatherapy was introduced as a complement to guided imagery and Healing Touch to enhance relaxation and therapy benefits. Healing Touch soon became a popular modality offered alone or in conjunction with other modalities.

The Healing Care Program provides complementary services that support oncology patients and their caregiver(s) throughout treatment and for two years after treatment.

Another partnership, with a local senior center, integrated cancer prevention education with self-awareness and introspective awareness activities. The cancer prevention material and overall well-being education was presented through programs by a registered nurse along with guest speakers who shared their experience as either a survivor or caregiver. To help foster self-awareness and introspective awareness, opportunities to walk a labyrinth and receive laying-on of hands with prayer were offered at each program.

The Healing Care Program is actively engaged in research studies exploring the benefits of Nia and journaling. Nia is a holistic fitness program that blends elements from the dance arts, martial arts and healing arts. The first Nia study found that Nia helped to reduce fatigue in women with breast cancer.²

Another Nia study is currently enrolling participants to further explore the benefits of Nia in women with

Currently, over 20 Healing Touch sessions are provided to patients and caregivers per month. In the beginning the numbers were much lower - not because of lack of patient or caregiver need - but because of the clinical staff's lack of awareness. That was resolved by offering *Introduction to Healing Touch* presentations to front desk staff and nurses. Participants were given an overview of Healing Touch and the benefits to cancer patients and included hands-on practice where all participants had the opportunity to give and receive a Healing Touch treatment. After this, the nursing and front desk staff had a better understanding of Healing Touch, and as a result, referrals increased - leading to the current success of the program. Today, the Healing Care practitioners, front desk staff and nurses work together to meet the needs of the patients and caregivers.

Healing Touch sessions take place in an office that has been designed to promote healing and relaxation.



There is a comfortable recliner for the patient, ambient lighting and a soothing décor. Sessions are typically 30 to 40 minutes in length, and begin with the patient identifying a goal for the session. Each session starts with a breathing exercise or general visualization to help with relaxation and is followed by a full body Healing Touch technique, such as a *Chakra Connection*.

Healing Touch has been helpful for many patients and caregivers dealing with the diagnosis of cancer and the cancer journey and can best be described through the following patient and caregiver experiences.*

Gary's cancer required extensive surgery to his esophagus and stomach. His recovery involved many complications and concerns, leaving him feeling angry and frustrated. Gary was referred to the Healing Care Program by his oncologist who stated he did not know what else to offer him!

Prior to his session, Gary had a very active life that included a deep spiritual practice. He and his wife came into the Healing Care office where the session was explained. Gary identified his goal for peace and calm. The session began with a breathing and visualization exercise for relaxation. Healing Touch was done using the *Chakra Connection* technique. It was noted by the practitioner that there was a lot of heat at his forehead during the technique. After the session, Gary remarked that he noticed a "green light flowing from his brow during the Healing Touch." He further identified that he felt that this represented the anger he had been holding inside. At the end of the session, Gary was visibly more relaxed and calm. The positive experience led to the integration of Healing Touch and self-care practices into his daily lifestyle.

Another patient, Caroline, was recovering from a diagnosis of ovarian cancer and required continued therapy with oral chemotherapy medication. Her oral chemotherapy created anticipatory nausea for her, leading to her inability to take the medication.

She was referred by her primary nurse to see if there were any services that might assist her with medication delivery.


Caroline came for a session and agreed to receive Healing Touch. To promote relaxation, the session started with a breathing exercise and a guided imagery technique that led Caroline to her special place. Healing Touch was done with focus work over her abdomen. After the session, the practitioner taught Caroline how she could hold her hands over her abdomen with intention and send a healing, calm light to the area. At a follow-up appointment, Caroline shared that she was taking her oral chemotherapy without any nausea or other problems.

The program also supports cancer patients' caregivers. Josie was a caregiver for her disabled sister who was dealing with a cancer diagnosis and treatment with chemotherapy and radiation. Josie voiced her stress of dealing with being supportive yet still managing daily activities at home and work. Healing Touch was offered using *Chakra Connection* and *Mind Clearing* techniques. Josie visibly relaxed during the session and later commented how much more energy she had after the session. The practitioner taught Josie how to modify the techniques for herself and recommended relaxation activities to use as coping strategies. She was encouraged to continue practicing these techniques and to make them part of a daily plan of care for herself.

Healing Touch is beneficial to cancer patients and caregivers, and can be successfully offered in an outpatient oncology department. Gary, Caroline and Josie each had different concerns and needs that were helped by Healing Touch. Their experiences correlate with those from other oncology centers using Healing Touch as an integrative modality³ - as one of the many supportive services that promote relaxation, comfort and healing. Furthermore, individuals are given guidance on how to integrate these practices



into their own lives to promote balance and wellness.

Over the years, the Healing Care Program has grown to what it is today, offering multiple one-on-one services and group classes, as well as, reaching out to the community and conducting research. The growth is a result of educating and engaging the staff at the time when Healing Touch was introduced as a service. Thus, the staff feels comfortable discussing or suggesting a referral to the Healing Care Program. The expansion of services has provided additional support and benefit to cancer patients and caregivers, providing healing and harmony during a time of stress and uncertainty. 

*Patient names have been changed.

1. Reis D. Meeting needs of cancer survivors through holistic community programs. *Beginnings*. Summer 2010;30(3):6-7.
2. Reis D, Walsh ME, Young-McCaughan S, Jones T. Effects of nia exercise in women receiving radiation therapy for breast cancer. *Oncol Nurs Forum*. Sep 1 2013;40(5):E374-381.
3. Hart LK, Freel MI, Haylock PJ, Lutgendorf SK. The use of healing touch in integrative oncology. *Clin J Oncol Nurs*. Oct 2011;15(5):519-525.