

Nurses Integrate Holistic Therapies for Patient Comfort in Outpatient Oncology

by DEBRA REIS, MSN, RN, CCA

A sense of powerlessness and fear of the unknown arises when a person receives a cancer diagnosis. Supportive therapy tools can be helpful for anxiety and stress. Often, there are more acute concerns like unexpected claustrophobia, panic during a procedure, or extreme nausea and pain. Supportive therapies have been beneficial bringing balance and comfort in critical situations.

Holistic therapies have been an integral part of the outpatient oncology centers of ProMedica Cancer Institute for more than 20 years. The Healing Care Program is a complimentary service for patients and their families to help them cope with a cancer diagnosis and the possible side effects of treatment. The goal is to provide therapies that patients can integrate into their care plan of overall wellbeing with a sense of empowerment.

The Healing Care Program includes three RNs who have education and experience in Healing Touch, Clinical Aromatherapy, Guided Imagery, and more. We provide services and tools for patients across nine outpatient facilities in Northwest Ohio and Southeast Michigan.

Services Provided by the Healing Care Program

Post cancer diagnosis, a person may experience a host of feelings from anxiety to depression. Information and decisions happen quickly, and the person can feel overwhelmed questioning their choices. Healing Care provides patients with coping strategies to help them discover the tool(s) that best fit their plan of care. These services are integrated into our program's policies and procedures; they include:

Relaxation Therapies: such as breathwork, visualization, guided imagery, and energy therapy like Healing Touch. We use these modalities alone, together, and with other services. Relaxation therapies have been highly beneficial in acute situations. Guiding a person with breathwork, visualization, and intentional touch can soothe anxiety. Guided imagery may assist the person to a deeper state of relaxation where they can calm their mind and make more precise decisions.

CASE STUDIES

The use of supportive therapy tools is highly beneficial to patients diagnosed with cancer. These therapies give patients strategies to control their mind, body, and spirit for balance and healing peace. Holistic therapies are successful for acute situations such as anxiety and pain. We have seen that reducing the need for added medications or rescheduling a procedure can be avoided, which are cost savings for organizations. However, the most significant benefit is seeing the transformation of a person from being depressed or angry to one who is looking forward to living life.

Anger, Frustration, and Heaviness Dissipated for Sam

Sam had surgery for esophageal cancer. He was feeling depressed in his recovery progress. His physician needed support and referred him to the Healing Care Program. Sam was a retired engineer who was accustomed to controlling his environment. This diagnosis and treatment had taken control away from him, which created internal anger and depression. Sam admitted that he was feeling angry and depressed but was having a hard time processing these emotions. He was extremely open to anything that would help him that didn't include taking more medication.

Our session began with relaxation therapies that Sam could practice and do on his own. He was accompanied by his wife, who wanted to learn some of these tools to help Sam. Guided imagery was integrated with the energy therapy of Healing Touch so Sam would feel safe and in a place of peace. After our session, Sam shared that he

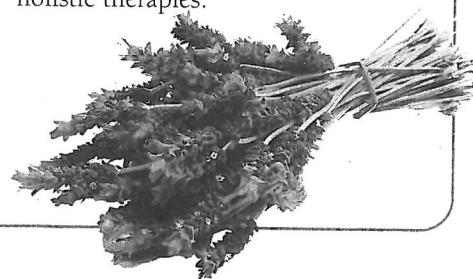
felt the anger leave at his brow center. He was amazed at how much "lighter" he felt. We discussed how anger and frustration could feel heavy within our body, mind, and spirit. Sam agreed that these tools would be a part of his plan. He continues to practice and integrate therapies years after his diagnosis and treatment. Sam's physician connected with me to let me know how much he appreciates holistic therapies and their benefits as part of a treatment plan.

Improved Sleep, Comfort, and Relaxation for Sharon

Sharon was diagnosed with breast cancer and had challenges in her recovery. She had acute pain in her shoulder and numbness in her affected arm. Sharon was experiencing depression and loss of sleep related to treatment side effects. She did a self-referral to the Healing Care Program. Upon our initial meeting, Sharon's demeanor was flat and she was tearful due to the pain and its control over her life.

Our session began with the use of aromatherapy to help increase her spirits. Sharon chose a blend of citrus essential oils which was provided to her on a tissue and made her feel uplifted. Relaxation tools of breathwork and visualization were added along with guidance on using these tools at home. Energy healing was integrated into the session with a focus around her head, neck, and shoulders, which were her most significant areas of concern.

Sharon had some challenges relaxing but felt greater peace during our session. She continues with regular sessions and has expressed that the Healing Care Program "saved my life." She uses relaxation tools, sleeps better, and has found a balanced plan for pain control. She is enjoying being active in her life and continues using holistic therapies.



Clinical Aromatherapy: using essential oils primarily through inhalation on a tissue or aroma stick. Upon inhalation of an aroma, the aromatic molecules move from the olfactory system to the limbic system in the brain, which is the region related to emotion and memory. Aroma sticks are an excellent resource for long-term use as a trigger for relaxation. We may use aromatherapy to help a person calm down, focus, and/or uplift a mood. Inhalation of Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) can quickly soothe, Cedarwood (*Cedrus atlantica*) can ground and enhance focus, and Lemon (*Citrus limon*) can support upliftment and be energizing.

Ear Seed Therapy: for protocols of digestive concerns, pain, and sleep/stress issues. Seeds are

placed on the outside aspect of the ear that correlates with acupressure points within the body. Ear seeds may be used alone or in combination with other services. We have used ear seeds with acute anxiety and discomfort along with other modalities such as breathwork or aromatherapy.

Gentle Movement: specifically Nia and chair exercises taught by the Healing Care practitioners. This year, our cancer center has a specific initiative to provide better assessment and planning of physical activities with our patients. The evidence supports exercise for patients during and after cancer treatment for the benefits of energy renewal, flexibility, and strength (McDowell, 2019).

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Using Complementary Therapies to Aid Side Effects

Holistic therapies may be helpful to treat side effects such as nausea, mood changes, and discomfort. The patient may benefit from combining aromatherapy, relaxation therapy, and ear seed therapy for any of these concerns. For those with cancer diagnoses, fatigue is the number one complaint, and the evidence shows that exercise gives the best results for energy renewal and mood upliftment (Cancer.Net, 2019). We provide cancer patients with information and education on free, gentle movement classes at nearby facilities.

Harmonic Resonance for Balance

Dr. Gerber (1988) points out that when the human organism is weakened such as with an illness like cancer, a different or less harmonic frequency oscillates in the body (p. 28). A low frequency may be felt as low energy, depleted mood, lack of motivation, and more. Holistic therapies assist the person back to a harmonic resonance or balance by helping to raise the body's vibrational frequency.

Research shows prayer and positive affirmation increase the frequency of the body. Gerber (1988) states that vibrational modalities help to strengthen energetic connections by rebalancing the body/mind/spirit complex as a whole (p. 502). Holistic therapies such as Healing Touch, aromatherapy, and movement are vibrational therapies that work to balance the human energy field.

Holistic Therapies Benefit Clinical Staff

Two days a month are provided for our clinical staff to receive holistic therapies for their own balance and well-being. We

provide 20-minute sessions during lunch breaks. Common concerns expressed by staff include physical ailments such as muscle tension, headaches, and indigestion. Many of the clinicians complain of stress bringing anxiety and fatigue. As in most healthcare settings, we've seen an increase in these concerns with the COVID-19 pandemic. Holistic therapies can aid in balance and peace, and we can do these therapies quickly with long-lasting effects.

REFERENCES

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Did you know there are published NCSBN Guidelines for the care of patients using medical cannabis? Cannabis nursing has evolved from an optional expertise, to a professional requirement. You can learn about these guidelines on our website & attend our annual conference CNNC where we are covering everything you need to know.

Cannabis Nurses Network empowers nurses with the education, expertise & supportive community they need to understand these guidelines & exceed these requirements. With unprecedented professional development opportunities for nurse entrepreneurs, consultants, educators & thought leaders - **the future of nursing is being forged here.**

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