



RESEARCH CORNER

# The Use of Healing Touch in the Treatment of Cancer

Norman L. Morrow, Deborah Poelker, and Jeannette Nienaber

**H**ealing Touch (HT) and related energy-based therapies, such as Therapeutic Touch and Reiki, have been identified as important adjuncts to the allopathic treatment of cancer. They are reported to reduce anxiety, fatigue, pain and other effects of cancer and cancer treatments such as chemotherapy. As a result, many cancer treatment protocols now include or make available an option to include these energy modalities.

As awareness regarding the efficacy of these therapies increases, so has the need to scientifically validate these observations. Ideally, such experimental design involves double blind, placebo-controlled studies with statistically large sample populations spanning several years. Such a study should yield both qualitative and quantitative data that is obtained using standardized clinical testing procedures.

However, the ubiquitous and subtle nature of the human bio-field has made it difficult to objectively evaluate the impact of energy-based therapies. For example, the electromagnetic field of a refrigerator magnet is 50 gauss and that of the earth is 0.5 gauss, while the human bio-field strength is only 10-9 gauss.

Bio-field characteristics have, therefore, necessitated the use of biomarkers, physiological changes and more subjective measures, such as the use of anecdotal surveys, in evaluating efficacy. Additionally, developing standardized methods for the treatment of test subjects and eliminating confounding impacts has been challenging.

In recent years there have been some studies on the direct impacts of energy modalities on cancer itself, using animal models, for instance, on mice that have been injected with breast cancer cells. These studies have not shown inhibition of cancer cell growth but have shown other impacts at a cellular level. For example, in the study reported by Yang, et. al. (2020) the treated animals exhibited enhanced cancer cell death, in part mediated through modification of the tumor microenvironment.

A common conclusion related to scientific research regarding the effectiveness of Healing Touch and related bio-field treatments is illustrated by the following comments in a 2014 paper by Gonella, et. al.: *"Although biofield therapies are among the most ancient healing practices, data on their effectiveness are*

*poor and additional multicenter research with larger samples are necessary.”*

In this review we attempt to summarize the results and/or conclusions of a few of the more scientifically rigorous quantitative studies and reviews of the last 25 years. A more complete listing of research articles on the use of Healing Touch in cancer treatment is included on the Healing Touch Worldwide Foundation website. The Healing Touch Worldwide Foundation is hoping to incentivize additional research in this area by helping to fund additional studies.

An extensive review of available research on the impact of bio-field energies on cancer pain was published in 2015 by Selfridge. She concluded that: “To date, there is statistically significant evidence that energy medicine may be helpful for low-grade reduction of pain intensity,” but “There remains insufficient high-quality research to support decisions to use energy therapies as treatment or adjunctive therapy for other medical conditions, or even other dimensions of the pain experience.”

The impact of Healing Touch on cancer patient pain levels was demonstrated in a 2018 study by Gentile, et. al. In this study 291 cancer patients at outpatient cancer treatment centers received a Healing Touch treatment from a certified practitioner. Patients reported pain scores before and after the single treatment using the 0-10 pain scale. Medically and statistically significant pain relief (>2 points pain reduction) was found for 68% of the study participants after this single HT treatment. This study reflects two notable features of energy measurement studies. First, use of a well-established measurement approach to evaluating efficacy avoids the difficulties associated with attempting to compare results between “treated” and “untreated” cohorts. Although this approach is open to a claim that all the impacts are due to the placebo effect, the statistical significance of the findings supports the primary argument that the indicated effect is real. Secondly, it is common practice to evaluate multiple modalities during a study. In this case, the researchers evaluated the application of “oncology massage” in parallel with the application of HT. For that technique they also identified statistically significant pain relief. Evaluating multiple techniques in parallel is common because of the efficiencies associated with identifying suitable subjects and in organizing and

conducting the study.

In addition to reducing pain, anxiety and fatigue reduction are important goals for Healing Touch treatment of cancer patients. Several studies, including some on children, have identified the impact of HT on these factors. For instance, in 2013 Wong, J, et. al. reported on a small study on the effects of Healing Touch on these factors in children undergoing treatment for various cancers. While the study cohort was too small to be definitive, they concluded: “these findings suggest that HT has a positive impact on pain, stress, and fatigue related to oncology treatment.”

As we pointed out in our previous Energy Magazine article (Morrow, Poelker, Nienaber [2022]), there are many outstanding research design challenges when evaluating Healing Touch efficacy. These research design issues are extensively discussed in a 2015 article by Jain, et. al. Additional studies will need to consider how to effectively address the concerns applicable to this type of investigation, but the value of confirming the efficacy and understanding the basis for the efficacy of Healing Touch and energy medicine modalities in general cannot be overestimated. €

#### References:

- Gentile, D., et. al. (2018) Cancer Pain Relief After Healing Touch and Massage, *J Altern Complement Med*, 24(9-10), 968-973.
- Gonella, S., Garrino, L and Dimonte, V, (2014) Bio-field therapies and cancer-related symptoms: a review, *Clin J Oncol Nurs*, 18(5):568-576.
- Jain S, Hammerschlag R, Mills P, Cohen L, Krieger R, Vieten C, Lutgendorf S. Clinical Studies of Bio-field Therapies: Summary, Methodological Challenges, and Recommendations, (2015). *Glob Adv Health Med*. 4(Suppl):58-66.
- Morrow, N., Poelker, D., and Nienaber, J, (2022) *Energy Magazine*, July-Aug 2022.
- Selfridge, N., (2015) *Energy Medicine: Is There Evidence?* Integrative Medicine Alert, at <https://www.reliasmedia.com/articles/134837-energy-medicine-is-there-evidence>
- Wong J, Ghiasuddin A, Kimata C, Patelesio B, Siu A. (2013) The Impact of Healing Touch on Pediatric Oncology Patients. *Integrative Cancer Therapies*. 12(1):25-30.
- Yang P, Rhea PR, Conway T, Nookala S, Hegde V, Gagea M, Ajami NJ, Harribance SL, Ochoa J, Sastry JK, Cohen L, (2020). Human Bio-field Therapy Modulates Tumor Microenvironment and Cancer Lung Stemness in Mouse Lung Carcinoma. *Integr Cancer Ther*. 19:1534735420940398.



Learn more about author Jeannette Nienaber by visiting: [www.JeannetteMNienaber.com](http://www.JeannetteMNienaber.com)