

Review Article

Reiki: a modality towards holistic approach to cancer cure

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ABSTRACT

Reiki is one of the complementary and alternative medicine modalities which have been accepted and appreciated, globally. Many evidence based studies have validated its role in cancer. Reiki can play a major role in changing the patient's outlook towards life and increasing the patient's ability as well as willingness to comply with physician's instructions and adhere to treatment protocols. The goal of Reiki treatments is to strengthen the flow of energy through these blocked or disturbed pathways, thus decreasing pain and enhancing the body's natural ability to fight illnesses and heal itself. It combats the nausea caused from chemotherapy. One of the major criticism is lack of scientific foundation. There has been effort to collaborate conventional and complementary therapies to improve the quality of future research. In the near future, it may be considered as one of the advanced modalities of alternative medicine used in conjunction with conventional therapy for holistic approach for cancer management.

Keywords: Reiki, Cancer, Complementary, Pain, Therapy

INTRODUCTION

Cancer is one of the most common causes of distress in the world. Globally, it is estimated that 13% of all deaths each year occur due to cancer and in the next 2 decades, a further 70% increase is expected. There are more than 100 types, each requiring unique diagnosis and treatment.¹ Any Cancer diagnosis is often perceived with shock, disbelief followed by anger, anxiety, insomnia and depression. Though with plethora of modern medical interventions, with adherence rates ranging from less than 20% to 100%, non-pharmacological intervention may play a major role. Alternative Medicine interventions with conventional care have been utilized to have relief from associated stress, pain and suffering and have led to improvement in the adherence. Modern medicine is based on evidence based knowledge about the body and uses treatments that have been proven by significant results through scientific research. However, complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is often used by the general

public that may not be well acquainted or accepted by many healthcare practitioners.²

CAM modalities have gained popularity as it can enhance the quality of a person's overall care and peace of mind, when used in addition to other standard cancer treatments. Some studies have shown that using such therapies can help patients to better manage disease and treatment side effects.³⁻⁷

One of the CAM modalities, Reiki has been accepted and appreciated globally owing to its positive results being validated in many evidence based studies.⁵⁻⁷ Reiki is a combination of Japanese words "rei" and "ki" meaning universal life energy. Reiki is an ancient laying-on of hands healing technique that uses the life force energy to heal, balancing the subtle energies within our bodies.

Present article aims at reviewing concept, trends and practice of Reiki as CAM method for cancer cure

particularly in Indian context with exploring its possibility in holistic care of cancer patients.

TIMELINE AND CURRENT TRENDS

Reiki was developed in Japan by a Buddhist monk Mikao Usui in 1922. For cancer, reiki was first offered by university of Texas MW, Anderson cancer centre in Houston in 2001. Then in 2003, was offered as a complementary therapy to cancer patients. Since then it has come a long way and premiere research institutes have documented evidence of healing power of Reiki.⁸ (More recently, there have been reviews conducted in United Kingdom and Canada supporting the clinical effectiveness of reiki in relieving pain and has also been studied in Brazil to produce significant effects using 5 Reiki sessions in relieving pain in cancer patients as a part of the integrative care in oncology.^{2,7}

Reiki has started to grow in top cancer hospitals worldwide. According to American Medical Association (AMA), 84% of hospitals indicated patient demand as the primary rationale in offering complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) services including Reiki and 67% of those surveyed stated "clinical effectiveness" as their top reason. In India, it started around 1992 and currently an estimated 10 lac people are practicing reiki and the numbers are swelling each day.⁹

HOW DOES REIKI WORK?

It is a complementary bio-field and subtle energy therapy that enables body ability to heal it, so facilitated by touch. Since its inception, it has been adopted in different cultures, by varied ethnic people, globally. Reiki practitioners use this as a technique, called palm healing or hands-on healing by which a "universal energy" is allegedly transferred through the palms of the practitioner to a patient in order to encourage healing. It is based on the belief that when spiritual energy is channeled through a Reiki practitioner, the patient's spirit is healed, which in turn heals the physical body. It involves balancing of energy either from a distance or by placing hands on or near the patient. No pressure is applied to the body and sometimes there is no physical contact. Reiki addresses physical, emotional, mental and spiritual imbalances.

Reiki states that whenever there is disruption, weakening or blockage of flow of the "Life Force Energy", emotional or health problems tend to occur. The goal of Reiki treatments is to strengthen the flow of energy through these blocked or disturbed pathways, thus decreasing pain and enhancing the body's natural ability to fight illnesses and heal itself. Stress and pain are the established two main factors with cancer and reiki addresses these two leading to peacefulness and calmness. It also combats the nausea caused from chemotherapy. Reiki has been proven to be safe and no adverse effects have been reported till now. Rather it has

shown to aid with side effects from anesthesia, chemotherapy and radiation therapy like insomnia, fatigue, depression, skin problems slows disease progression; improve immune function; strengthens overall health and supports inner transformation.⁹ Furthermore, it has been proposed just like chemotherapy drugs, as it has the energy to transform cells to undergo change and result in cell cycle damage. However, the time required for this transformation may be longer than the time taken by chemotherapy.

As the Reiki continues, it can help to change the patient's outlook towards life and increase the patient's ability as well as willingness to comply with physician's instructions and adhere to treatment protocols.¹⁰ Another positive aspect of reiki is, it is easy to learn, doesn't demand expensive instruments. Those who practice it, report its help in self-care to healthy lifestyle.

CAVEATS AND CRITICISM RELATED TO REIKI

Reiki usage is usually recommended with caution by many practitioners due to potential risk of worsening of state of cancer. People may experience weakness, tiredness, indigestion or a headache after having reiki. Patients are often advised to expect this due to release of toxins and advised to take rest and remain well hydrated.

As Reiki is a non-invasive technique causing no side effects or complications, it can be performed on cancer patients at virtually any time following their diagnosis. Whether the patient is newly diagnosed and waiting to begin treatment is actively undergoing treatment or is in the late stages of cancer and facing a poor prognosis, Reiki sessions are usually beneficial. Studies have validated that patients embracing reiki sessions showed more improvement in cure than their counter parts.⁵ Another noteworthy aspect of reiki is it can be received in battery of ways like as stand-alone health care treatment, by a Reiki professional, from a friend or family member who has learned to practice it though may not be a professional and patient himself too can do self-treatment.

One of the criticisms of reiki is lack of scientific foundation. More so, due to poor knowledge about homeostasis in modern medicine, to measure the effect of reiki remains doubtful. To measure any individual's balance is a dubious task because every individual responds to stress and circumstances in different ways. There is also a need to highlight that whether the linear simplicity of the randomized controlled trial is well suited for studying complex, multileveled therapies like Reiki. There is a unique confounding variable the effects of human touch leading to questioning of the outcomes. Though many studies suggest the effectiveness of it in various diseased conditions but there is dearth of well designed, reproducible research validating its role more than a placebo.¹¹

CONCLUSION

Though clinical efficacy has been demonstrated in multiple studies but still additional research is warranted. Also need of its awareness has to be generated so that health professionals can offer evidence based recommendations to patients. In National Cancer Institute (NCI) in USA collaboration between conventional and complementary therapy is already being done in order to improve the quality of future research. It is highly unlikely that it cures cancer but undoubtedly increases the adherence to conventional treatment which in turns leads to better clinical outcomes. In the near future, it may be considered as one of the advanced modalities of alternative medicine used in conjunction with conventional therapy for holistic management of cancer patients.

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