

Reiki in Senior Living Facilities

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Images of a quiet, boring life in senior facilities can be quickly dispelled with one glance at their activities calendar! The myriad of classes, special interest groups, recreational functions, and more keep seniors engaged and well socialized. However, there is one more significant dimension to consider when we reflect on their overall health and well-being.

The activities directors of these programs have the ongoing, daunting task of creating and maintaining a robust and balanced schedule. The show must go on, so to speak, seven days a week, 365 days a year! Activities are planned for a wide variety of participants. Many of the schedules include bingo, musical performances, appropriate exercise classes, magic shows, pet therapy, and much more. Yet, as we look at all the facilities that house our seniors, one could wonder why is it that some places provide a thriving and enriching environment for their residents and some fall short? What is it that makes the difference? New trends are developing in some of the facilities to address the increased needs of both the residents and staff. Such terms as "enrichment," "engagement," and "enhancement" are being added to, or replacing the "activities" nomenclature. Further, the social, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of the residents AND caregivers are evolving due to the unprecedented 30-year increase in longevity in the 20th century, due to advances in the medical field (NCHS, 2001).

However, there is a three-part "perfect storm" developing in the United States. First, there is an increased need for senior housing and/or senior homecare due to the "silver tsunami" which is upon us. In the United States, over 10,000 people turn 65 every day. This population bubble (baby boomers) will continue for approximately 15 years. Second, although seniors are living much longer, chronic health conditions are a daily reality. Finally, there is another population who are greatly affected by the explosion in the senior population: caregivers. Caregivers, both paid and unpaid, have their own challenges in their role which include exhaustion, depression, burnout, and anxiety. These conditions can lead to substance abuse, overeating, and a variety of other "self-medicating" coping mechanisms.

Let's consider the health of seniors. Four out of five seniors have at least one chronic health problem. One in three have activity limitations associated with those conditions (Vierck & Hodges, 2003). A steady decline of health comes with each new chronic disease. On average, for each decade he or she lives, the senior develops one additional chronic illness. Among the most common are arthritis, high blood pressure, hearing impairment, heart disease, cataracts, limb deformities or impairments, chronic sinusitis, diabetes, tinnitus, and visual impairments (Source: National Center for Health Statistics).

Chronic illness has a dramatic effect on seniors. It significantly reduces their quality of life as well as their ability to independently handle their ADLs (activities of daily living). According to a study conducted by the Alliance for Aging Research (AAR), Americans who prematurely lose their ability to live independently increase overall national health care costs by \$26 billion annually (AAR, 1999). The study revealed that it is not the big killers like cancer and heart attacks that most rob seniors of their independence; rather it is under-recognized and undertreated chronic conditions. Further, it is important to recognize that health for seniors involves not only physiological aspects, but mental, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions as well. Clinical depression and other mental health conditions can develop from the stresses associated with the onset of other diseases.

Next, let's consider the other, equally important, population in the overall picture of senior care: caregivers. For paid staff in facilities and in homecare, coping tools in stressful times are welcomed. The more stable, balanced, and comfortable their patients/clients are, the easier it is for them to face their job day in, day out, year after year. In the case of family caregivers (usually unpaid), their "shift" is often around the clock. Although family caregivers can access training, many suffer in silence with depression and/or anxiety. Often, this state becomes overwhelming, sometimes resulting in self-medicating with drugs and/or alcohol.

As we consider the entire situation, it is encouraging to look at facilities that have successfully added innovative programs to their menu of services: CAMs (complementary and alternative medicine also known as the healing arts or therapeutic services) in hospitals. Among the many CAMs or therapeutic services offered in hospitals, one modality is uniquely qualified to offer relief to both seniors and caregivers for a variety of reasons: Reiki.

Reiki is a hands-on modality which channels the universal life energy, promoting accelerated healing, deep comfort, pain management, and stress relief. One of its outstanding features, which is unique among the healing arts modalities, is that it has no contraindications. Reiki is safe in every situation. It is also the most sustainable of all healing art modalities in that it requires no materials, no time limits, no extra room, and no medical releases. Reiki is a tried-and-proven modality in many hospitals and hospices.

For over a decade now, Reiki has been a rising star in hospitals throughout the United States. Similarly, Reiki programs in senior living facilities have a tremendous potential. Reiki is uniquely qualified as a helpful adjunct modality because both the receiver (in this case the senior) and the transmitter (Reiki practitioner) benefit from treatment.

Pauline MacKay, who is in charge of the Reiki program at the Concord NH Hospital, reports steady acceptance of the program since its inception in 2001. In a meeting in December of 2013, MacKay reflects, "When we're with a patient and the doctors or nurses come by on their rounds, they wave to us and say they'll come back later. They see their patients are relaxed and are getting a great benefit from Reiki." MacKay goes on to say how Reiki has been accepted and is appreciated now among the staff. The program is now in its 13th year and MacKay estimates over 500 Reiki treatments are done each year.

Reiki programs have gotten a strong foothold in other hospitals in New Hampshire including Portsmouth, Wentworth-Douglass, and Dartmouth Hitchcock [Lebanon].

Prestigious hospitals in other states offering Reiki programs include:

- * New England: Hartford CT
- * Columbia University Medical Center, NY
- * New York-Presbyterian Hospital, NY
- * Duke University, NC
- * Yale New Haven Children's Hospital, CT
- * Cleveland Clinic Wellness Institute , NJ
- * Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, NY
- * University Medical Center, AZ
- * Children's Hospital, MA
- * Dana Farber Cancer Institute, MA
- * Hartford Hospital Integrative Medicine, CT

(See www.reiki.org/reikinews/reiki_in_hospitals.html for complete information.)

Reiki has gained acceptance and has become a welcomed partner in hospitals. It is a very accessible and consistent way to improve patient care. Interviews of medical professionals corroborate this view. "Reiki sessions cause patients to heal faster with less pain," says Marilyn Vega, RN, a private-duty nurse at the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital in New York. [Reiki] accelerates recovery from surgery, improves mental attitude and reduces the negative effects of medication and other medical procedures. Reiki has proven to be a good business choice in hospitals due to its consistent efficacy in the areas of stress, anxiety, chronic pain and self-care."

Benefits of Reiki include:

- * Reduces stress and anxiety
- * Help manage pain
- * Promotes feeling of control and engagement in own wellbeing
- * Promotes trust between patient and caregiver(s)
- * Additive benefit to conventional drug therapies potentially allowing reduced medication, fewer side effects and toxicities

For caregivers, benefits include:

- * Reduction of stress/burnout
- * Promoting positive well being, sense of competence

Reiki has been proven to be helpful in fast-paced health environments to reduce stress, anxiety, and pain in patients and caregivers. Reiki can be administered to self (great for caregivers). Reiki has also been a welcomed partner in the arena

of palliative care.

Additional CAMs or therapeutic services will undoubtedly follow in facilities such as aromatherapy, Yoga, T'ai Chi, biofeedback programs such as HeartMath, meditation groups, crystal therapy, and a host of other modalities not yet in the mainstream. Reiki, however, with its unique characteristics and track record in the hospitals, make it an excellent first and powerful step in senior care.

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