

Reiki and Breast Cancer

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IN AN EDITORIAL ENTITLED “Alternative Therapy for Breast Cancer: Outcomes, Obstacles and Opportunities” published in the April 2011 issue of *Annals of Surgical Oncology*, author Sheldon Marc Feldman, MD, FACS, and Chief of Breast Surgical Oncology at New York’s Columbia University Medical Center discusses research that supports his rationale for inviting Reiki practitioners to assist with his breast cancer patients. His article presents a scientifically supported view as to why patients require more than just traditional Western medicine in order to face cancer. He states unequivocally that patients who are resistant to receiving the proven life-saving treatments of surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation are much more likely to accept these traditional treatments when they are being offered in partnership with alternative healing methods, thereby increasing their chances for survival from their disease. I quote Dr. Feldman here:

At Columbia, we have initiated a study that incorporates the role of Reiki practitioners in applying mind-body principles and energy healing to help to prepare patients for breast cancer surgery and emotionally accept the loss

of their breast(s). We must continue to strive to provide care that is patient-centered and reduces the stress and trauma of disease.

What Dr. Feldman has presented on the pages in this medical journal is, in fact, an expression of the reality he lives by. For those of us in the field of alternative medicine who know him, he is a man of power, vision, and brilliance who has the ability to inspire everyone he meets.

For several months now, Dr. Feldman has invited me to join him in his quest to serve the needs of his patients. When they ask him, “How can I get ready for this, doctor?” he tells them that they should consider Reiki before, during, and after their procedures, because there is less bleeding, blood pressure stays steady, complications are kept at bay, and healing is quicker when patients receive Reiki as part of their treatment. This has resulted in many trips to the operating room for me, and I can honestly say that no two cases are the same. Surgeries might be called by the same name: “lumpectomy,” “bilateral mastectomy,” and so on, but the fact is, every life with its circumstances is unique, and every moment is totally different from any other. Here are a few examples of what I mean:

Patient Jenny was terrified of having a mastectomy and begged Dr. Feldman for a lumpectomy instead. After viewing all test results and considering carefully, he agreed that he would give her the lumpectomy if the pathology from the OR during surgery held up to support this course of action. The caveat was that under no circumstances would he take a chance that would endanger her life.

Luckily, we had several Reiki sessions beforehand. We concentrated on clearing her lymph nodes of any cancer. Her lymph nodes were of crucial importance and would be the determining factor of what Dr. Feldman would ultimately remove in the OR—either the tumors or her breast.

On the day of surgery, I met Jenny at the hospital very early, since Dr. Feldman wanted me to accompany her to a specific procedure pre-surgery. After checking into pre-op, I went with her to radiology. In between x-rays being taken to identify the exact location of the tumors, I provided Jenny with Reiki during the painful insertion of hollow needles containing wires. These wires would later lead Dr. Feldman to the tumors during the surgery. Reiki rendered this needle-insertion ordeal much easier to bear.

When the operation got underway, as always, I was working next to the anesthesiologist, sending Reiki directly through the top of Jenny’s head. Dr. Feldman removed the tumors along with the lymph nodes, all of which were sent to the lab for immediate evaluation. A cheer went up when the results came back “negative,” and Jenny got to keep her breast.

In another situation, a woman we’ll call Nancy had to have one of her breasts removed due to the size of the cancer therein. In her case, she decided to have a double mastectomy in order to avoid another surgery later on. Dr. Feldman wanted her to have Reiki during surgery, but because her insurance company refused to pay one of her very expensive bills, she didn’t have the

money. In her case, her family paid my fees. Nancy had a wonderful support system—her husband and mother came to the hospital with her, and they were so glad that Nancy had me with her through her ordeal. In her case, she had a numbing procedure done just before the actual bi-lateral mastectomy; ports of local anesthetics were inserted into her back so that her pain would be lessened in her recovery after the surgery. This, too, is a painful procedure, and Reiki helps tremendously to withstand it. These decisions and these surgeries are all very scary stuff for a woman to deal with! But the one constant I notice is that when Reiki is being offered, women feel empowered. They know that there is someone present who is concentrating on one thing and one thing only: to flood them with life force at a time when they are most vulnerable. It is comforting for them to know that when they are under anesthesia, someone is there filling them up with the loving power that heals, which is what I know Reiki to be: Love that heals, plain and simple. How can we measure the effects of Love? How can we know the ways in which it is keeping these women safe? We can only observe and acknowledge the comfort that Reiki brings.


New York Columbia Presbyterian is a teaching hospital; every time I am in the OR, there are young doctors being exposed to Reiki for the first time. “What are you doing?” they ask. Their responses are quite funny at times. Once when I

replied, “Well, I’m channeling universal life force energy for her healing,” the doctor who asked gave me a look like I was from outer space and said, “What? Are you for real?” I just chuckled as Dr. Feldman said, “Yes, she’s healing the patient even now while we’re doing the surgery.”

Cancer in a woman affects her entire family, and in most cases a large community of friends. To know that a Reiki Master is present in the OR is always a grace for those who love the woman whose life is on an operating table, out of their sight. Her family and friends know that she is not alone in that scary place. To realize that her life itself is being cared for and nurtured by the power of Reiki is a level of “good” for the family that is likewise immeasurable. I’ve received letters from clients afterward, telling me how much they and their families love me, which for me, is the greatest honor and the most rewarding part.

And now here’s something really special I wish to share with you: I was just on a case a few days ago and met Dr. Feldman at 6:30 am in his office to get my scrubs. All the hallways in that part of the hospital were dark—he was the only one already at work. As he fished the scrubs out of the darkened hall closet, I mentioned that I had been wondering about something: “Dr. Feldman, I’ve been curious to know, do you feel the Reiki during surgery? Do you notice a difference when Reiki is in the operating room?” “Oh yes, Raven, I do. I think the whole surgery team feels it, even

though they probably don’t realize what it is,” and with that he turned back down the hall to his office, to his endless paperwork and countless e-mails, while I raced back to pre-op to give Reiki to his patient while she awaited her 7:30 am appointment with him in the OR.

There aren’t words enough to express how grateful I am to Dr. Feldman for giving me the opportunity to bring Reiki to women who have their backs up against the wall of breast cancer. Not only does it contribute to their healing, but Reiki also soothes them, brings them confidence in the outcome, allows them to “believe” that all will be well; and because Dr. Feldman has recommended it, his patients see him in a light bordering on the divine. He is also making it possible for other doctors in other fields of medicine to encounter and consider Reiki—like the plastic surgeons who come in right after a mastectomy and the ever-changing teams of anesthesiologists and the OR nurses—it’s just so wonderful that Reiki is spreading into their hearts and minds. I wonder if Dr. Feldman knows how lucky the women and their families consider themselves to be to have a brilliant doctor giving the best, most excellent surgery available on planet earth, while allowing the comfort and loving power of Reiki to be part of their treatment. I suspect he might... 

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