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# Immediate Symptom Relief After a First Session of Massage Therapy or Reiki in Hospitalized Patients: A 5-Year Clinical Experience from a Rural Academic Medical Center

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** There is an increasing demand for and use of alternative and complementary therapies, such as reiki and massage therapy, in hospital-based settings. Most controlled studies and practice-based reports include oncology and surgical patient populations; thus the effect in a more heterogeneous hospitalized patient population is hard to estimate. We examined the immediate symptom relief from a single reiki or massage session in a hospitalized population at a rural academic medical center.

**Design:** Retrospective analysis of prospectively collected data on demographic, clinical, process, and quality of life for hospitalized patients receiving massage therapy or reiki.

**Subjects:** Hospitalized patients requesting or referred to the healing arts team who received either a massage or reiki session and completed both a pre- and post-therapy symptom questionnaire.

**Interventions:** First session of routine reiki or massage therapy during a hospital stay.

**Outcome measures:** Differences between pre- and postsession patient-reported scores in pain, nausea, fatigue, anxiety, depression, and overall well-being using an 11-point Likert scale.

**Results:** Patients reported symptom relief with both reiki and massage therapy. Analysis of the reported data showed reiki improved fatigue (−2.06 vs. −1.55  $p < 0.0001$ ) and anxiety (−2.21 vs. −1.84  $p < 0.001$ ) statistically more than massage. Pain, nausea, depression, and well being changes were not statistically different between reiki and massage encounters. Immediate symptom relief was similar for cancer and noncancer patients for both reiki and massage therapy and did not vary based on age, gender, length of session, and baseline symptoms.

**Conclusions:** Reiki and massage clinically provide similar improvements in pain, nausea, fatigue, anxiety, depression, and overall well-being while reiki improved fatigue and anxiety more than massage therapy in a heterogeneous hospitalized patient population. Controlled trials should be considered to validate the data.

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