

# Does Therapeutic Touch Help Reduce Pain and Anxiety in Patients With Cancer?

**Emily Jackson, BSN, RN, Megan Kelley, BSN, RN,  
Patrick McNeil, BSN, RN, Eileen Meyer, BSN, RN,  
Lauren Schlegel, BSN, RN, and Melody Eaton, PhD, MBA, RN**

With more than 10 million patients with cancer in the United States, pain and symptom management is an important topic for oncology nurses. Complementary therapies, such as therapeutic touch, may offer nurses a nonpharmacologic method to ease patients' pain. Using 12 research studies, the authors examined the evidence concerning the effectiveness of this type of treatment in reducing pain and anxiety.

**M**ore than 10 million people in the United States had some form of cancer in 2007, including 1,444,920 newly diagnosed cases. Prostate and breast cancer rank among the highest incidences at 29 and 26 percent, respectively (American Cancer Society, 2007). A cancer diagnosis brings about feelings of fear, pain, and anxiety. Billions of research dollars are spent each year to find better, more effective, and curative treatment. Treatment currently varies depending on the type of cancer, with chemotherapy and radiation regimens being used along with traditional pain-control medications. Traditional medical management of patients' symptoms does not consider the holistic nature of the disease and the human healing process. Patients should have access to care that helps fight the cancer and alleviates fear, anxiety, and pain. Many therapies have been researched to determine the best methods for alleviating cancer symptoms and the side effects of treatment. Therapeutic touch has shown promise in helping patients with cancer find relief from pain, anxiety, and fear (American Cancer Society, 2006). This evidence-based study examines research regarding the effectiveness of therapeutic touch.

## Background

Therapeutic touch is a therapy in which the hands are used to facilitate the healing process (Lafreniere et al., 1999). The therapy was introduced in the early 1970s by Delores Krieger and Dora Kuntz as a noninvasive nursing intervention derived from ancient Eastern forms of healing (Kelly, Sullivan, Fawcett, & Samarel, 2004).

Several studies link nursing care to positive cancer therapy outcomes and suggest a need to explore nontraditional therapy modalities, such as therapeutic touch, as viable options to

## At a Glance

- ◆ In 2007, 1,444,920 new cases of cancer were diagnosed in the United States.
- ◆ Therapeutic touch is a complementary therapy that is used to help with the anxiety and pain related to cancer treatment.
- ◆ Therapeutic touch is an energy therapy involving hand movements to equalize and balance energy flow. Healing is promoted when body energy is balanced.

complement standard cancer therapy. A randomized, controlled study by Given et al. (2002) evaluated symptom management during chemotherapy and found that patients with cancer experience pain and anxiety during chemotherapy. The 53 patients in the experimental group and 60 in the control group were interviewed using a symptom experience scale, which measured symptoms, physical impact, and social functioning. The patients received standard care and chemotherapy, but the experimental group received additional nursing interventions for symptom management. Those interventions were tailored to individual issues and categorized as teaching, counseling

---

Emily Jackson, BSN, RN, Megan Kelley, BSN, RN, Patrick McNeil, BSN, RN, Eileen Meyer, BSN, RN, and Lauren Schlegel, BSN, RN, all are senior nursing students, and Melody Eaton, PhD, MBA, RN, is an undergraduate program coordinator and associate professor, all in the Nursing Department at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA. No financial relationships to disclose. (Submitted June 2007. Accepted for publication August 6, 2007.)

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/08.CJON.113-120