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University team studies 3829 spiritual healing effects

A UNIQUE study of "healing" for women receiving long-term hormone therapy for breast cancer is being undertaken by researchers at the University of Southampton. The university's complementary medicine research unit, in cooperation with cancer doctors in Southampton, is assessing whether individual spiritual healing has any effect for women who are experiencing side effects of drugs used in the long-term treatment of breast cancer.

Spiritual healing, commonly known as the laying on of hands, will be performed by healers from the Harry Edwards' Healing Sanctuary, which is registered with the National Federation of Spiritual Healing. The study is offering suitable patients ten weekly sessions of healing, each lasting for about 30 minutes. The healers do not diagnose or prescribe but during healing they seek to restore the harmony of mind, body

and spirit and so improve wellbeing. Fiona Barlow, the researcher who is leading the study, says: "The side effects of drugs used in the treatment of breast cancer, such as Tamoxifen, can be unpleasant. These side-effects can be particularly difficult to cope with when women have already been through the traumatic experience of breast cancer.

"There is good evidence to suggest some women are tempted to take a break from their drugs so they can have a 'holiday' from the side effects and this could have serious implications for their recovery prospects." The study, which is based at Southampton General Hospital, is currently recruiting women in the Southampton area who have had their initial treatments for breast cancer and are now suffering side-effects from taking conventional medications to prevent cancer recurrence.