

Appendix 22
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RESEARCH STUDY OF SPIRITUAL HEALING IN SOUTHAMPTON

THE SOUTHAMPTON University's Complementary Medicine Research Unit is assessing the effects of individual spiritual healing for women who are experiencing adverse side effects of drugs used in the long-term treatment of breast cancer. The study is investigating whether spiritual healing can support and complement the medical care for these women.

Cancer is a frightening disease and its diagnosis strikes fear into the heart. In 2004 the UK National Office of Statistics showed that 36,900 women were diagnosed with breast cancer in England. Early detection and improved treatments have meant that survival rates have risen, yet it is the second most common cause of death after lung cancer. One in nine women will develop breast cancer at some time in their lives. Initially its treatment can include surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy, after which many will be put on hormonal therapy (such as Tamoxifen, which helps prevent recurrence of the cancer), a treatment lasting for at least five years. Many women experience unpleasant side effects, such as hot flushes, depression, joint aches, mood swings and lack of libido which can be particularly difficult to cope with for those who have already been through the traumatic experiences of the diagnosis and treatments. There is evidence that some find the side effects so difficult that they will stop taking the tablets for a short while, a 'drug holiday'. Naturally this is of concern, as it is not known what effect having such a break may have on their overall health.

For the past year healers have been travelling to Southampton from the Harry Edwards Healing Sanctuary, to give healing to women who are taking Tamoxifen or a similar drug and finding the side effects difficult to cope with. The women have ten weekly sessions of healing at the Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Facility within Southampton General Hospital. Spiritual healing is offered as a complementary therapy to help support the orthodox medical treatments.

Whilst there is a great deal of anecdotal evidence that Spiritual healing helps people cope with ill health, there is very limited research. This can partially be explained by the methodological challenges spiritual healing poses to the researcher. For normal quantitative clinical control trails we need to know certain basic information before we start: what dose we should give and how often? What is a suitable placebo? What effect measures shall we use at the end? These are difficult questions to apply to Spiritual healing, yet there is a need for research. The study uses a qualitative methodology based on Unitary Appreciative Inquiry. This methodology recognises the uniqueness, wholeness and unity of human energy, how it interacts with its environment and how it changes over time and with different experiences. Unitary Appreciative Inquiry seeks to discover and understand patterns in behaviour and to use this knowledge to inform future care for cancer patients.

Information is collected in several ways. Each week when the women come for healing we have a chat about their week and their responses to the previous week's healing. The women also keep a log each day so they can note anything that happens during the week. This is not just a note of their health but also life events. For example one of the women noted that, for the first time in 16 months, she had found enough energy to bake a cake. A small event in the grand scheme of things maybe, but a very important milestone for her and her family.

At the end of 10 healing sessions we get together for a more formal interview about their experiences. These interviews give personal accounts of how breast cancer and spiritual healing have impacted on their lives.

They are asked to attend a focus group, where several who have completed their healing sessions, get together to share experiences and to give researchers a clear picture of the common experiences. At all times the women can comment on any aspect of the research.

The study is on-going and we are still recruiting patients. Initial responses have been encouraging. Healing has helped both physically and psychologically with the side effects. Several patients said they found a sense of peace, calmness or serenity after healing. All have said they would recommend spiritual healing to others.

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