

A Lay Person's Journey to Practicing Healing Touch in the Hospital

by Kay A. DuBois, HTCP

Since becoming a Healing Touch Certified Practitioner in 1998, my goal was to have a small but financially supportive business. As a “lay person,” it has been a major accomplishment for me to attain this distinction. (I have kept the encouraging note in my portfolio that Janet Mentgen wrote during my Level 5 class after personally viewing my work.) My ultimate dream was to work in a hospital. Impossible, I thought, but as a mother of a heart transplant recipient, I had years of “on the job” experience.

I received training through Memorial Hospital in Colorado Springs, as well as Denver Children's Hospital, to be a support parent for other families who had received the same devastating news, that “yes, your child has a heart defect, and his/her only chance of survival is a heart transplant.” I volunteered in a few support groups, starting as a speaker/coordinator and quickly graduating to President of one of the groups. It was a club in which we did not choose to be members, but once initiated, put our hearts and souls into learning everything we could to make this the best possible life for our kids.

My home-based business was small, but I loved being available if my daughter needed me. After spending the first 10 months of her life in the hospital, she had done remarkably well, with no rejection or major illness, but still, my focus stayed mainly on her. Then in 2003, eleven years after her first transplant, she was admitted to the hospital experiencing acute rejection -- facing a second transplant. A few days after being admitted, she suffered a cardiac arrest right before my eyes! I was in a serious state of shock. The nurse who originally introduced me to Healing Touch still worked at Children's Hospital. She spent every free moment doing Healing Touch for us. While staying across the street at Ronald McDonald House, we received a Reiki treatment once a week from a volunteer. I think it literally saved our lives in many ways, and it was this turning point in my life that inspired me to pay it forward and volunteer my time when we returned home from Denver.

First, I approached Ronald McDonald House sending them a well thought out presentation of my experience and what I wanted to offer, but I never received a response. I was disappointed and had no idea what to do next. A few weeks later my husband convinced me to attend a Heart Fair sponsored by Memorial Hospital. We did, after all, have a history of heart disease in our family, and I realized that I, too, needed to take care of myself. While getting my finger pricked for a cholesterol test, I noticed an oncology display, and on a sudden whim, I asked the ladies who were there if they offered any complimentary therapies at their facility. Britta Newcomer, RN, BSN, OCN was the first to approach me. She was the Oncology Resource Manager and had a list of all the complimentary therapies they offered. Healing Touch was on the list, but they had no one currently providing the service, so I quickly volunteered.

I was surprised to learn that the only requirement for me to work there was to attend the next volunteer training and submit a portfolio with my credentials and resumé for their board to approve. By February 2005 I began working at Memorial Hospital's Oncology Clinic. It was a very exciting time for me as I began working one day a week while my daughter was in school. I started with three clients and as the demand grew I increased to four per day expanding to two days per week. Within the first two months I received my first MAP Award (Memorial Appreciation Award) through a client nomination. It was from a woman who had been having anxiety during a blood transfusion in the Outpatient Oncology Chemotherapy Unit, expressing her gratitude for being able to relax and fall asleep during our session.

Our program eventually grew to three Healing Touch practitioners and we began offering treatments three days during the week in addition to some on call work, usually for inpatients.

The staff in our unit, many of whom now come to us for Healing Touch, have been incredibly supportive, from the receptionists to the nurses and physicians. Clients are not only referred by Britta, but by the physicians due to the exceptional client

feedback. Clients also spread the word to each other in their support groups, or while sitting next to someone in the chemotherapy unit. Healing Touch presence continues to slowly spread throughout the hospital through staff lunch presentations and annual staff health fairs within the hospital.

We share a room with a Reiki and Jin Shin Jyutsu practitioner. An adjustable exam table is loaded with pillows and linens for patient comfort. Dim lighting and a CD player complete the transformation from exam room to a relaxed healing environment. Sessions are structured for a full hour to allow clients time to provide an intake and process after a 40 – 50 minute session. Besides the usual documentation forms the practitioners use, clients complete a short survey immediately prior to and following their Healing Touch session, identifying on a scale of 1- 10 their relative experience of pain, fatigue, depression and nausea.

Probably the most gratifying aspect of my work is my interaction with clients. Because of the experience with my daughter's chronic illness, I am able to empathize with my clients' challenges, their fears and emotional issues. My training as a support parent taught me how to connect and relate emotionally with a certain amount of detachment and to refrain from projecting my "stuff" onto them. Healing Touch has taught me stay grounded, so I don't drain my own energy but which enables me to work with compassion and an open heart. I have gained knowledge of many resources, largely through my own utilization, and am able to refer my clients to the appropriate persons for psychotherapy, or other medical professionals for additional help. Working in oncology for over four years has given me that knowledge base and confidence to own it as my specialty, and I love seeing the gratitude on my clients faces after a session.

I have found that oncology clients chakras generally tend to have a particular pattern when undergoing chemotherapy and radiation. They tend to be consistently open, but with a very large spin, with the field feeling cool and non-vital, the energy very expanded, leaving them feeling very vulnerable emotionally. The techniques I utilize the most are *Full Body Connection*, *Full Body Magnetic Clearing*, with *Wound Sealing* for scar integration following surgeries, and *Mind Clearing* for anxiety or insomnia.

One client in particular, came to me after already undergoing months of chemotherapy. She was extremely anxious and could

barely sit still in her chair. Insomnia and chemotherapy induced menopausal symptoms were making her miserable, and she was trying Healing Touch as a final attempt to find relief. She told me that she didn't think it was going to help. When I arrived at her heart center as I was doing a *Chakra Connection*, she suddenly began to quietly sob. I held the space for her while she began to talk, venting all the pent up feelings and fears she had been having since her diagnosis of breast cancer months before. When she finished, I moved on, completing the session. During our follow-up discussion, she told me how moved she was by her experience. Even though she felt extremely anxious at that point of breaking down - as I held the space for her - the emotions settled and she felt as if a huge weight had been lifted and the feelings had resolved. It was life changing for her. She felt that she had finally found the renewed strength to cope. She continued to receive treatments from me, eventually asking me to come and work on her immediately prior to her scheduled double mastectomy.

One day as I was working on a client, it occurred to me that I should teach a self-care class for my clients and their caregivers. I had no idea how it would come about, but decided I needed to tell Britta before I lost my nerve. I rarely saw her during the course of my day, but on that day, she was right outside the door when I was leaving. I told her about my idea and she was as enthusiastic about it as I was. It wasn't long after that she came to me and said that there had been grant money offered by the CR Bard Company. She asked to me to write a proposal, and in January, 2009, I taught my first class to fifteen people. We scheduled six classes for the year and response has continued to be very good.

I don't know what the future holds for my work at Memorial Hospital. Increased exposure and patient satisfaction has encouraged more of the nurses to begin taking Healing Touch classes at Memorial Hospital under the direction of the Oncology Nurse Navigator, so that there will be more access to Healing Touch throughout the hospital. I envision more growth and opportunities to come, which is quite an accomplishment for this woman who used to think that there might not be so many open to a practitioner with no medical background.

About the author:

Kay DuBois, a Healing Touch Certified Practitioner since 1998 and a Reiki Master, began her journey to Healing Touch when a nurse at the Denver Children's Hospital showed her some

techniques to use with her baby daughter who was recovering from her first heart transplant. During the years following the transplant, Kay was active in several support groups for parents of children born with heart defects. She became a support person for other parents going through similar challenges, through training seminars at Memorial Hospital in Colorado Springs and Denver Children's Hospital.

During her Healing Touch training, Kay was an Office Manager for a massage group, where the therapists were also training in Healing Touch. She helped to organize and facilitate a Healing Touch clinic and began offering Introduction to Healing Touch presentations.

She now maintains a private Healing Touch practice in her home, volunteers once a week at Memorial Hospital's Oncology Center in Colorado Springs, and this year was awarded a grant through Memorial Hospital to teach a self-care class for patients and caregivers. It was her experience over the years with her daughter's illness that gave her the inspiration and moved her through her insecurities as a lay person to eventually work in the hospital environment.