



Integrative Medicine at Virginia Mason Hospital

By Anna Marie Newman, RN, BSN, LMP, HTCP/I

I would like to tell you about my experience, as a patient, of integrative medicine at the Virginia Mason Hospital in Seattle, WA. In December 2010, I was scheduled for robotics surgery that was anticipated to take four to five hours and would involve a one or two night stay in the hospital. Since we do not have the capacity in my home town of Ellensburg to do robotic surgery locally, I went to Seattle, which is over 100 miles away over a snowy mountain pass.

Virginia Mason has a wonderful reputation for excellent care and specialists of all kinds. I had known people who had gone to VM for care in the past, and were pleased with their care. However, having worked in many different hospitals in forty years of nursing, I was still a bit anxious about being a patient there. After all, I did not know any one there. Who was going to hold my hand when I went to sleep?

I began gathering my support force. My local Ellensburg Healing Touch group, friends and family would hold me in a pink blanket of love during my surgery. Barb Dahl, RN, HTCP/I would come to my motel the day before surgery to prepare me and would then be holding the energy for me during surgery.

I made phone calls to the VM pre-op area requesting information about the possibility of receiving Healing Touch during my stay. Eventually, I was put in contact with Andrew Latter, RN, BSN, Assistant Nurse Manager of Peri-Anesthesia Care Services. Without hesitation, he said, *“Of course you can have a Healing Touch Practitioner in PACU (Post Anesthesia Care Unit). We find our patients do better when this takes place. How soon after coming to PACU do you want them there?”*

I also asked the pre-op nurse and pre-op anesthesiologist for permission to use my I-pod with calming music throughout my

surgery and PACU stays and asked if they would be willing to read my “Healing Statements” as I went to sleep and as I woke up. Although, they would not be present on the unit the day of my surgery, they did take notes about my requests and said the people on staff that day would have to make the decision, “but be prepared to be told no.”

On the day of surgery, while I was in pre-op admissions, two people came by to see me. The first was my doctor who stopped by, acknowledged the requests I had made, and assured me that my circulating nurse would be reading my “Healing Statements” as I went to sleep. Andrew came in, introduced himself, and assured me that he would be in the PACU when I arrived and that he would facilitate my HT Practitioner getting to the right place at the right time.

When I arrived in the pre-op induction area, my anesthesiologist came in, introduced himself, acknowledged my requests and said, *“Of course you can keep your i-pod on if that helps you, and I’ll be helping to say your Healing Statements.”* The last thing I remember as I went to sleep was my circulating nurse, Tammy, holding my hand and stating, *“Following this operation, you will feel comfortable and you will heal very well.”* I went to sleep feeling safe in their care. After surgery, my surgeon visited my family in the waiting room and reported that I had been very well prepared for surgery and that it had gone exceptionally well, much faster than she had anticipated (only 3 ½ hours by my husbands calculations).

I remember waking up only once in the recovery room, with Keela Marshall, ARNP, HTCP/I standing at my right side, smiling and doing Healing Touch. My PACU nurse was standing at my left side and I had a feeling of gentleness and care, all was well. Then I went back to sleep.

My next memory was being in bed on the 12th floor of VM, (I do not know how I got there!), with my husband, Jim, and daughter, Kelly, at my side. My daughter pulled out my bag of crystals, oils, Bach Flower Rescue Remedy and holy water and calmly, quietly put these into place. The nurses all had questions about these things, and as I explained my need and purpose for them, they all accepted my wishes regarding whatever it would take to keep me calm and relaxed to help my healing. In fact on the second day when I was having an “unhappy” time, my nurse came in and said, “*You’re in pain and you need to take your pain medicine. Do you realize you do better when you have your i-pod on, are holding your crystals, and have this oil on your hands.*” (I had taken the i-pod off to recharge it an hour before and had put down the crystals at the same time.) This wise, perceptive nurse was there for me on all levels.

As I put my i-pod back on, I let the Universe know that I was tense, was having trouble being grounded and needed some help. The Universe responded as the next song shuffled to the top -- Cynthia Hutchison’s “grounding” meditation from her first CD!! Now go figure that happening!!!!!! The next morning I was discharged from VM, right after Keela did another Healing Touch treatment, preparing me for my trip home.

Not only did the staff of Virginia Mason take good care of my physical needs but they, also, were supportive of my spiritual and holistic needs. They respected and encouraged me to use my i-pod with calming music, my oils and other objects that comforted me. They were friendly and supportive of my husband and daughter as they sat with me. For me this is a testament to what exceptional integrative care can be and hopefully will not be the exception in any hospital in the future.

After discharge I was fortunate to have the opportunity to stay in the Seattle area for several days to rest and receive post surgical energy treatments from friends, Susan Dakis RN, HTCP and Nora Baker, Energy Worker. I am now back in Ellensburg, recuperating well, enjoying lots of Healing Touch

treatments from my local group of healers, and remembering my time in the hospital as a pleasant experience with much support from a multitude of directions.

My note of gratitude to Andrew and the PACU staff brought this response: *I am very happy that I and my staff could accommodate your needs and that you felt all aspects of care were provided to you. The “Medical machine” that is VM sometimes becomes too focused on the medical care of its patients and loses sight of the other just as vital aspects. It was a good and timely reminder for all of my staff that there is more to caring for our patients than just medications and numbers.*

About the author:



Anna Marie Newman, a nurse for 40 years, has worked in both city and rural hospitals. She has worked in the operating room, obstetrics, medical surgical units, nursing education and management. She has a private massage and Healing Touch practice, facilitates a Healing Touch practice group, and coordinates Healing Touch workshops. She has been associated with the Healing Touch program since 1994.