

Research Corner

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In this quarter's Research Corner, we have the privilege of presenting a summary of a pilot study by Janice Maville, currently Program Coordinator and Assistant Dean in the College of Health Sciences and Human Services at the University of Texas-Pan America and her colleagues, Judy Bowen and Grant Benham. *Pilot studies are the dress rehearsals of larger studies.* They are done to make sure there are no unexpected glitches in design or execution of a study. Findings from a pilot study often help to decide whether the larger version should even take place depending on whether the findings are promising. The smaller numbers of subjects in pilot studies can make trust in significant results premature but do support proceeding to a larger study. Jan explains in this article the importance of the pilot study in 'testing the waters' for a larger study. We look forward to a follow up article when the results of the larger study are available. I think I can speak for all of us in saying we appreciate the contribution to the body of quality Healing Touch research this group is making.

- Kathy Moreland Layte

Maville, J.M., Bowen, J. E., & Benham, G. (2008). The Effect of Healing Touch on Stress Perception and Biological Correlates of Stress in University Health Science Students. *Holistic Nursing Practice*, 22(2), 103-110.

The researchers in this study investigated the effect of Healing Touch on perceptions of state/trait anxiety, and the biological measures of heart rate, blood pressure, skin conductance/resistance, skin temperature, and oxyhemoglobin in otherwise healthy university students. This was a pilot study and used a single group, repeated measures design with a non-probability convenience sample of thirty subjects. Healing Touch, conducted by a certified practitioner, included two techniques, **Magnetic Passes: Hands in Motion** and **Chakra Connection**. These techniques were consistent throughout each session and were delivered in a specifically timed sequence.

Physiological data were collected prior to the intervention, during Healing Touch treatment, and post intervention. With the exception of skin conductance/resistance, changes indicative

of a relaxation response were observed in all the physiological measures. Results of the State/Trait anxiety inventory, given before and after treatment, were significant for a decrease in state (how one feels at the moment) from pretreatment to post treatment regarding perceived stress. Subjects post treatment voiced comments regarding sensations experienced such as feeling light, heavy, tingly, cool, and heat. Of particular interest was that 63% of subjects reported a feeling of being safe. The results of this pilot study indicate that Healing Touch has a positive effect in the promotion of relaxation and reduction of stress as perceived by the individual. As such, the inclusion of Healing Touch in clinical practice could be an effective adjunct in the holistic caring process.

A major challenge in performing this study, as with many quantitative studies involving energy modalities, were the many confounding factors beyond the control of the researchers that may have influenced changes such as merely having time to relax from everyday duties, coming into an air conditioned environment from a semitropical day, or being in the presence of a caring individual. Future researchers need to acknowledge such confounds and control for them as much as is possible. Also a challenge to researchers in regard to stress research are other factors that affect stress including nutritional state and overall physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health of the participant.

The value of pilot studies is often under appreciated. Such studies, however are vitally important in testing or refining every aspect of the quantitative research process including research methodology, treatments or interventions, data collection instruments, sampling plan, and data analysis. As a result of this pilot study, a second study has been completed that included a control group, random sampling, deletion of oxyhemoglobin measurement and the addition of testing for changes in immune response. Results of the follow-up study are currently under analysis.