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ALL STORIES

HS SPORTS

SCHOOLS

DIRECTORIES

BLOGS

FOR

Healing Touch helping cancer patients

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STAFF WRITER

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When Geri Hahn finishes a Healing Touch session at Carol G. Simon Cancer Center in Morristown, she said she feels like she has finished a glass of champagne or a long nap.

The energy therapy known as Healing Touch offers Hahn a quiet comfort, she said, as she undergoes painful cancer treatments.

"I don't know how it works, and I don't care," she said. "I just love it."

Times have changed since Hahn's first bout with cancer some 17 years ago. Back then, she said her oncologist was dismissive when she decided to participate in a "laying on of hands" at her church.

Today, she said, her oncologist's office features a list of teas and their beneficial effects. And at Carol G. Simon Cancer Center at Morristown Memorial Hospital, Hahn receives sessions of Healing Touch and Reiki — two of several free holistic healing practices offered to patients and their families as part of the center's integrative approach.

"I'm taking advantage of every possible healing modality because I have a life to lead," Hahn said. "I think you have to be willing to try something new."

During Healing Touch sessions at the center, patients lay down, fully clothed on massage tables. Two volunteers, trained in Healing Touch, then place their hands above or on the patient.

Maggi Hutchinson, a Morristown resident who has been practicing Healing Touch for 10 years and is a certified practitioner and instructor, describes Healing Touch as a deep relaxation and a light touch therapy.

For people who are sick, Hutchinson said it can relieve pain, reduce stress, and decrease anxiety. But it's not reserved for those who are ill.

"Everyone has stress in their lives," she said. "It's a way to step out of the whirlwind of activity in your daily life, and slow down."

Unlike other energy therapies, Hutchinson said Healing Touch has a standardized curriculum and fits well with the medical model. It is a nursing continuing education program, and is endorsed by the American Holistic Nurses Association, though anyone can attend the training sessions and pursue certification.

Maria Mazzei took advantage of a number of the holistic therapies offered at Carol G. Simon Cancer Center, while receiving treatment there for ovarian cancer, including meditation, music therapy, Reiki, acupuncture, acupuncture and Healing Touch.

She was initially hesitant to try the mind-body therapies, she said, but found that they helped her. Healing Touch was helpful in pain management and relaxation, she said, while acupuncture reduced her nausea after chemotherapy. And all of the practices were successful in taking her mind off of her treatment, she said.

Now in remission, Mazzei said she intends to complete the necessary training to become a Reiki practitioner and a

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Staff photo: Dawn Benko
At the Carol G. Simon Cancer Center, volunteer Ann Meredith works on Bob Egan who volunteers playing piano at the center.

If you go:

WHAT: A level one training session in Healing Touch

WHEN: Saturday, February 6, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Sunday, February 7, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

WHERE: Morristown Memorial Hospital

FORMAT: A mix of lecture, demonstration and lots of hands-on practice

COST: \$325 for general public and \$290 for hospital employees

CONTACT: Maggi Hutchinson, 973-214-2582, maggi@HealingTouchNJ.com

Healing Touch practitioner.

"When you leave a Healing Touch session, you feel deeply relaxed," Mazzei said. "I think it helped me go through the journey."

Barbara Heap of Kinnelon has been volunteering as a Healing Touch practitioner at Carol G. Simon Cancer Center for a year and a half. Describing the experience as a powerful one, she said: "The only gains here (for us as volunteers) are we are helping other people — and the essence of that is beautiful."

For Hahn, the benefits of Healing Touch are profound. She said the sessions remind her that when her difficult and painful cancer treatments are over, "my real life will come back to me."

Of her advice to others contemplating holistic therapies, she said simply: "Take the trip."

For more information about Healing Touch, or to become a practitioner, contact Maggi Hutchinson at 973-214-2582 or maggi@HealingTouchNJ.com.

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