

Reiki Practitioner Collaborates with Hospitals

Reiki practitioners often wish they could offer Reiki in hospitals to support patients battling serious illness, but such opportunities are limited for those without conventional medical credentials (e.g., MDs, nurses, physical therapists). Gigi Jantos, a fifty-year-old former office manager and employee-training coordinator living in the suburbs of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, didn't let that stop her. Jantos has shown that with a little ingenuity and patience, nonmedical care providers can join forces with conventional caregivers. Instead of looking for hospital employment or offering Reiki as a volunteer, Jantos developed collaborative relationships in which she could give Reiki as an independent contractor.

Like so many practitioners, Jantos came to Reiki through a health crisis. Two abdominal surgeries left her exhausted, cranky, and wondering, "Why me?" A single Reiki session had such an immediate and positive impact on her well-being that Jantos said simply, "Sign me up." She learned first degree in 1994 and became a Reiki master three years later. Her experience impelled her to find a way to bring Reiki to patients facing serious diagnoses. Although she had no background in medicine, Jantos never doubted she could do it. She says, "I just started talking, and one thing led to another." Jantos currently has three separate, expanding programs. The story of her accomplishments may inspire you to create your own project.

Clever networking opened the door for Jantos at nearby York Hospital. She read that the medical director at the WellSpan Center for Mind/Body Health, Dr. Edward Rogers, Jr., had taken the MindBodySpirit Medicine course offered by Dr. James Gordon's Center for Mind-Body Medicine (www.cmbm.org). Jantos had also taken the course, and cited this common experience to create a connection. Although she had been practicing imagery before the training, having the certificate gave her credibility when she made the cold call. Rogers recognized her as a kindred spirit. He was impressed by her confidence and by the dedication she evidenced in taking the MindBodySpirit Medicine course. That certificate assured Rogers that Jantos had training he could trust. She began working for the WellSpan Center in a program to prepare patients for surgery based on Peggy Huddleston's work.

The center was interested in creating a complementary therapies program. Rogers wanted to include Reiki "as a technique that can help patients with anxiety, depression, and some physical symptoms, and which engenders a closeness, a sense of connection with the practitioner that helps improve patients' quality of life, regardless of the setting," he said. With the support of Rogers and administrative director Patty McGuire, Jantos and the center's acupuncturist opened a conversation with the hospital's grant office just as it received the application package sent yearly by the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation to potential grantees. Komen grant applications, like many others, must be made through an institutional sponsor (awards are not given to individuals). The hospital served as the sponsor and provided valuable assistance in writing the application. The grant was awarded in the summer of 2004, and the program offering breast cancer

patients Reiki, acupuncture, yoga, and mindful touch is scheduled to start in November 2004. Mindful touch is a modality created by a local breast cancer survivor which was added to the menu as another gentle touch option.

Applying for a Komen grant is a lot of work. Once the application is funded, implementing the program takes even more work. The team must meet with the medical staff to educate them about the new program, and with the marketing department to design a brochure and strategize how to market the program to the community. The budget has to be put in place. “Inevitably what you thought isn’t exactly what you need,” Jantos warns. And the program evaluation has to be designed rigorously enough to assure that the research community will take the documentation of patient benefits seriously. Komen STEP grants are designed primarily to fund services, not the necessary setup work. “Having a grant doesn’t mean all your time is compensated,” Jantos says.

Jantos was teaching in her private practice and wanted to create a class at York Hospital that would enable nurses to earn continuing education units (CEUs) while learning Reiki. The administration of the WellSpan Center for Mind/Body Health gave her the organizational backing she needed to get a Reiki class approved by the Pennsylvania State Nurses Association. When classes are approved for CEUs, the teacher has to submit forms with the course outline and hours and the class roster. All students have to fill out evaluations, which are turned in to the accrediting body. The paperwork has to be done separately for each level of Reiki, and updated if there are any changes to the curriculum. Once Jantos had all that in place, she decided to also offer hospital-based classes for the community. The classes were eventually combined and are offered quarterly.

Meanwhile Jantos’s passion for wellness was seeking more outlets. She created Angel Connections to provide four Reiki treatments pro bono to breast cancer patients. Jantos heard through the grapevine that the local chapter of the American Cancer Society had Making Strides Against Breast Cancer funding available. (She recommends checking out local chapters of national organizations because some have their own funding programs. “Stay local,” Jantos says. “That’s where the service area is and that’s who wants to help you.”) Making Strides offers community-based funding that is more approachable for grassroots organizations than most funding sources. This was important for Jantos, who had not yet written a grant application. Because Angel Connections is not incorporated as a nonprofit organization, Jantos needed an umbrella organization to receive the funds. She knew the local YWCA was interested in creating programs to support women and approached the administration with her idea. The Y collaborated on the grant proposal, and in just a few months, Angel Connections was in business. The next step was to connect with women interested in receiving four pro bono Reiki sessions. Jantos created brochures describing Reiki and the program and approached doctors’ offices and imaging centers throughout the area to place the brochures in waiting rooms. Although the response was almost invariably favorable, those connections did not bring many clients. More women came from cancer support groups, word of mouth, articles she wrote for free local newspapers, and especially from a radiation oncologist, Dr. Wally Longton, the medical director of Carlisle Regional Cancer Center, an off-site department of Carlisle Regional Medical Center. This connection came third-hand, an unsolicited introduction

from a nurse-turned-yoga instructor who knew Longton wanted to offer complementary therapies to his patients and was impressed by what she heard from friends about Angel Connections.

After receiving funding, it took another three months of promotion and outreach before Angel Connections served its first client in March 2003. As of September 2004, Angel Connections has offered 128 Reiki sessions. After clients complete their four sessions, Jantos mails the women a questionnaire eliciting feedback about Reiki's impact on their lives in terms of pain, stress, fear, fatigue, quality of life, and physical, emotional, and spiritual awareness. Approximately a third of the clients have chosen to learn Reiki self-treatment.

Side Bar

The Client's Experience

Here are some of the responses received to a questionnaire that asked, "How did this program help to improve the quality of your life?"

"The program made me think about how to deal with my life better."

"Helped me to be more peaceful and confident prior to second surgery."

"Made me more aware of my needs and putting myself first."

"It helped me slow down a fast-paced life style so that I can include more health-focused activity."

"Helped me become a person in control of my life, rather than a 'cancer patient,' and helped ease my fears of recurrence."

"Each session represented an oasis in my desert of pain and fear."

"Reiki helped me heal quickly and with less pain."

"Reiki has been so relaxing, which helped me to get a realistic perception and approach to what is going on in my life."

"Reiki treatments were unbelievably relaxing."

In February 2004, recommended by Longton, Jantos began working one day a week at Carlisle Regional Cancer Center. Patients are referred by the doctor or the nursing staff. Because of a grant Jantos received from a family foundation, patients pay a reduced fee of \$20 for each of the first four Reiki treatments (a sliding scale is available on request). After that, patients are able to continue to receive treatment at full cost. Jantos wrote this fee schedule into the grant application because it enables her to offer more treatments and, as she says, "When you have the ability to get care at a state-of-the-art cancer center, you likely have the ability to pay." This arrangement gives her the flexibility to waive the co-pay when asked. Jantos admires the staff's dedication and is grateful to have had such a positive first experience. She wonders how she might have been affected if the staff hadn't been so welcoming.

The nurses at Carlisle, Camille Wichrowski, RN, and Kathy Eisemann, RN, OCN, have equal praise for Jantos. Although Reiki is listed with the conventional modalities available at the center, such as nutrition, the nurses specifically mention Reiki to patients,

outlining the benefits especially to those they perceive to be at high risk. “Patients are usually overwhelmed by their diagnosis,” Wichrowski says. “At the time of their initial consultation, we know patients only hear thirty percent of what we’re saying, so we try to keep it simple and create the opening.” They introduce patients to Jantos, and she takes it from there. Both nurses hear frequent reports from patients of the benefits Reiki treatments have brought them. Many women speak of a lessening of fatigue and a greater sense of well-being, feeling more energetic and less stressed, which Wichrowski sees as supportive to the healing process. Some patients choose to continue after the initial four treatments, and some join a Reiki class. Carolyn Moore, RT, director of radiation oncology, says “Reiki gives patients a sense of choice, allowing them to really gain self-awareness, and helping them stay positive, regain a sense of control, and stay more relaxed throughout their treatments.” She notes some patients enjoy it so much that they send their husbands to see Jantos privately for treatment. Although Wichrowski hasn’t heard any negative feedback, she noticed two patients, elderly women, chose not to continue after the first Reiki session. According to Wichrowski, these women didn’t seem open to the whole concept, and their decision was likely related to cultural issues or to cohort in terms of age and lack of education about the mind/body/spirit connection.

In breast cancer treatment, radiation usually comes last in the treatment series, after surgery and chemotherapy. Eisemann notes that patients often do not fully acknowledge the emotional and psychological impact of cancer until after treatment ends. One patient said, “This is the scariest day of all, because what do I do now?” “Reiki helps patients to resume their lives after finishing treatment, and to face the uncertainty of life as a survivor,” says Eisemann. Moore says, “Complementary therapies teach patients that there are ways to regroup.” Moore is enthusiastic about expanding the program to include other complementary therapies and to make these treatments available to caregivers as well. Although the program does not benefit the center financially, Moore says the program improves patient outcomes. “Reiki helps overall results. Attitude-wise, patients feel better, and therefore they’re probably eating better and exercising more, and all that helps the ultimate outcome,” she says. “We see a lot of people do really well with their recovery.” Additional funding to expand the complementary therapies program and extend it to aftercare is being sought from a community foundation.

According to Jantos, “The biggest factor in how my work unfolded was the networking I did and still do. Having people introduce me to others is what helped my programs to grow,” she says. Although Jantos has a thriving business giving treatments and teaching classes, she continues to extend herself to her community. One of her recent volunteer projects was giving Reiki in-services for nurses. She set up a time with the floor nurse manager, and asked for a quiet space where she could meet the nurses one at a time. Jantos spent ten to fifteen minutes resting her hands on each nurse’s shoulders as he or she sat in a chair, and talked about Reiki. “Nurses are a good ally in this effort,” Jantos says. “A result has been that nurses attend my Reiki classes, and the hospital has a continuing education–approved class they can take.”

Jantos has had a lot of success in her mission to integrate Reiki into conventional medical care. There have also been numerous dead ends and stalled connections. At one point, she

sent twenty letters to doctors and chiropractors in her area, hoping to create connections for referrals. Only one person responded, and even that contact didn't seem to take root. However, a year and a half later, that person resurfaced and may be turning into another hospital collaboration. Jantos poured time and energy into developing her relationship with another local hospital system where support for Reiki already existed, but the project got bogged down in the administration and nothing came of it. These experiences were disheartening at the time, but Jantos has learned to make the effort needed and go with the synchronicity of the process. She says, "When I have tried to force opportunities and thought certain things had to work out, they never came to fruition." As she persevered, Jantos says, "I came to realize that I am a pioneer and that is not an easy place to be. I always knew that I was following my calling, my passion, but it didn't always feel like the rest of the world was paying attention." That's when the support of her husband and the friends who believe in her was especially nourishing, and of course, the notes from women who have benefited from receiving Reiki through the programs she created. One breast cancer survivor wrote, "Thank you for helping me realize it's not good enough just to survive—I want to thrive." And thanks to the dedication of Gigi Jantos, she is.

The next time you feel discouraged about the likelihood of being able to bring Reiki into conventional medicine, remember that somewhere in Pennsylvania, nestled between the wide Susquehanna River, the rolling farmland of Lancaster County, and Hershey's chocolate, Gigi Jantos is living proof that opportunities are made in heaven and in our own hearts and minds.

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