

# Integrating Healing Touch for Advanced Illness & End-of-Life Nursing Care

by DONNA M. ADAMS, RN, OCN, CHPN, HTCP/I, and MELINDA H. CHICHESTER, HTCP/I, EOL Doula

**A**s a person is diagnosed with advanced illness and approaches end-of-life, there are many aspects to the dying process that cause physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual issues for the patient and loved ones. Many seek the assistance of hospice care and/or an end-of-life doula to assist them on their journey home. Quality holistic care that supports body, mind, and spirit is essential to a peaceful transition. Holistic nursing recognizes “the totality of the human being,” including the human energy system, “to promote healing, peace, comfort, and a subjective sense of well-being for the person” (AHNA & ANA, 2013, p. 11).

Interventions may include conventional medications and care as well as energy medicine modalities.

When a person is terminally ill or grieving loss, it is the spirit (energy body) that needs to be nurtured. Nurture the spirit, and the heart will heal. When the individual appears to be struggling during the transition phase to death, consider that it is not a physical challenge but an energetic shift that needs to occur for a peaceful passing.

Death is not an end. It is an initiation into a yet unseen, mysterious passage for all human beings. Death is a rite of passage that brings a series of emotional stages experienced by the dying

person and the family. How a person and family respond to the reality of the end of life is largely dependent on their beliefs about life and what happens after the physical form dies. There can be a multitude of physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental reasons for the spirit to transition out of the physical body.

### Energy Medicine for Peaceful Passing

Increasingly, energy medicine modalities are being recognized and accepted as conventional medicine becomes more complex and medications cause a variety of side effects, some of which seriously impact quality of life and waking consciousness. Energy medicine is based on Einstein's theory that everything is energy. Through the pioneering work of Einstein and others, "present-day science is coming to understand that everything in our world is actually a form of energy, and all matter is organized into energetic fields" (Hover-Kramer, 2011, p.41). Subtle energy fields are all around and within us, and the human body has the capacity to process, receive, and transmit these energies (see sidebar at right).

James Oschman (2016), biophysicist and energy medicine researcher, defines energy medicine and describes how the subtle energies play an important role in one's health and well-being:

*Energy medicine recognizes that the human body utilizes various forms of energy for the internal communications that maintain and organize vital living systems and for powering processes such as sensation, digestion, circulation, and movement. Energy medicine involves the use of energies of particular intensities and frequencies and other characteristics that stimulate the repair of one or more tissues, or that enable built-in healing mechanisms to operate more effectively. Such energies can come from the environment, from another human being, or from a medical device. (Oschman, 2016, p.8)*

Energy medicine practitioners clear, open, and balance the human energy system supporting the client. Clearing congestion from the energy field promotes reductions of pain, anxiety, stress, and fear. The energy therapy of Healing Touch (HT) is one vehicle that can help a person connect with the spiritual self. When the physical and energetic bodies are relaxed, the transition phase at end of life becomes effortless and peaceful.

The focus of this article is on how energy medicine interventions like Healing Touch can be integrated with advanced illness and end-of-life care. The most important overall effect of HT and energy medicine interventions is that of the relaxation response. The relaxation response was introduced by Dr. Herbert Benson of the Mind/Body Medical Institute at Harvard in 1975. Dr. Benson (2009) describes the relaxation response as a physical state of deep relaxation which counteracts the physiological effects of stress and illness. He notes that there are many methods to elicit the relaxation response, including energy healing, breathing techniques, prayer, meditation, visualization, progressive muscle relaxation, acupuncture, massage, tai chi, qi gong, and

## Examples of Subtle Energies

1. The multidimensional biofield that interpenetrates and surrounds the physical body
2. The major energy centers that exist in relation to the spinal column and serve to receive and send out vibrational energy
3. The meridian pathways that course through the body and major organs
4. Basic grids and flow patterns
5. Subtle electrical and magnetic fields
6. Subtle thought fields
7. Morphogenetic fields, which are believed to transfer intergenerational information

Source: (Hover-Kramer, 2011, p.42)

yoga (Benson & Klipper, 2009). Carol Komitor (2006) describes the physiological response of energy healing and illustrates how it aids in creating "stability within the immune system" (see Figure 1 on page 24).

Healing Touch is a holistic, energy medicine-based modality in which practitioners use their hands in a heart-centered and intentional way to enhance, support, and facilitate physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health. Practitioners use light touch or use their hands above the body to "clear, balance, and energize the Human Energy System (HES) in order to promote health and healing for body, mind and spirit" (Mentgen & Bulbrook, 2017, p. 2). A crucial teaching within the Healing Touch Program is the emphasis on practitioner preparation and creating sacred space to facilitate a healing response in another. One of two main theoretical frameworks of HT is that of Jean Watson's (2005) Caring Science, a widely known and respected nursing theory.

According to Dr. Watson, Healing Touch makes explicit heart-centered, spirit-to-spirit, loving connections between the HT practitioner and the recipient, in alignment with Caritas Nursing:

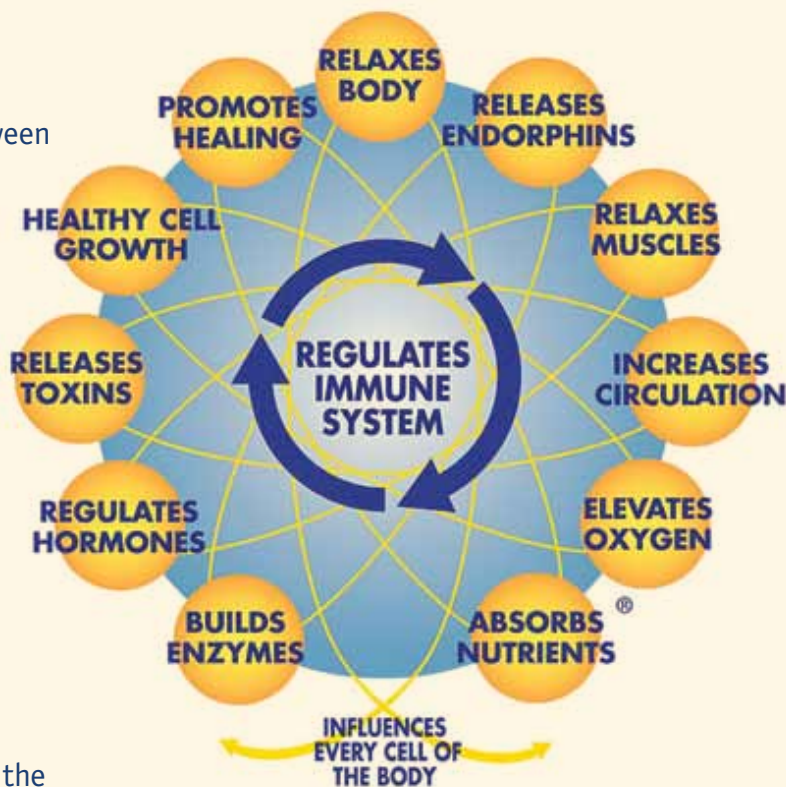
*Healing Touch is an example of an intentional caring-healing modality grounded in an ethic, philosophy, values, and consciousness consistent with my original Theory of Human Caring and Transpersonal Caring. Thus, there is a convergence between Caritas Nursing and Healing Touch in that they both work from an energetic framework of Universal Love as the basis of all healing and all caring-healing relationships. (Watson as cited in Mentgen & Bulbrook, 2017, p.16)*

HT is administered extensively in the nursing profession as well as with other allied healthcare professionals who embrace this form of energy medicine. Studies have indicated a relationship between HT and a reduction in anxiety,

*continued on page 24*

# THE PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSE OF ENERGY HEALING

- Energy medicine treatment initiates relaxation to the body.
- The relaxation response releases endorphins in the brain.
- The endorphins relax the muscles.
- Relaxed muscles create more space between cells providing increased circulation.
- The increased blood flow elevates oxygen levels throughout the body.
- Accelerated blood flow allows nutrients to be absorbed more efficiently.
- Enzymes build for proper digestion.
- Hormones regulate to strengthen the body's constitution.
- Toxins release from the body.
- Healthy cells begin to regenerate.
- A sense of well-being is established which promotes healing.
- When the body has a stable physiology, the immune system is regulated. The resulting stability within the immune system affects the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual facets of the body's energy field, supporting self-healing.



The list follows the graphic in a clockwise direction completing the process in the center.



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**Figure 1.** The Physiological Response of Energy Healing (Komitor, 2006), courtesy of Healing Touch for Animals®, [www.healingtouchforanimals.com](http://www.healingtouchforanimals.com)

stress, depression, tension, and pain (Hart, Freel, Haylock, & Lutgendorf, 2011; Jain et al., 2012). It is also effective in supporting individuals and families through advanced illness and the dying process, however more research is needed to assess the use of energy medicine interventions with this population (Henneghan & Schnyer, 2015; Mentgen & Bulbrook, 2017).

Donna Adams, RN, OCN, CHPN, HTCP/I holds certifications as a Healing Touch Certified Practitioner/Instructor, hospice and palliative nurse, and oncology nurse. She utilizes HT with her patient population to assist them on their journeys of chronic illness and through the dying process. Donna believes that death is another natural form of healing.

One HT intervention that Donna provides is the *Chakra*

*Spread*. This is a gentle method administered to support opening the energy centers to facilitate body, mind, and spirit healing, especially during times of various life transitions. It was integrated by Janet Mentgen, founder of the Healing Touch Program (HTP), into the program after she learned it from a hospice nurse. This beautiful method aids in the transition of individuals who are in hospice care, for the terminally ill, and for people in physical and emotional pain. Donna shares an experience of how HT supported her dying patient:

*I was asked by a hospice colleague to see a patient who had been actively dying for several weeks, and who appeared emotionally and physically uncomfortable. The family was*

quite distressed that she was so uncomfortable and not transitioning. I met with the husband and daughter and introduced Healing Touch and the Chakra Spread. I invited them to stay in the room while I administered the Chakra Spread. During the session, the patient shifted from crying out and moaning to becoming calm and quiet. She passed peacefully that night with her husband and daughter by her side. The daughter stated she and her father were very grateful for the session and believed that it allowed her mother to move into transition peacefully and without fear or resistance.

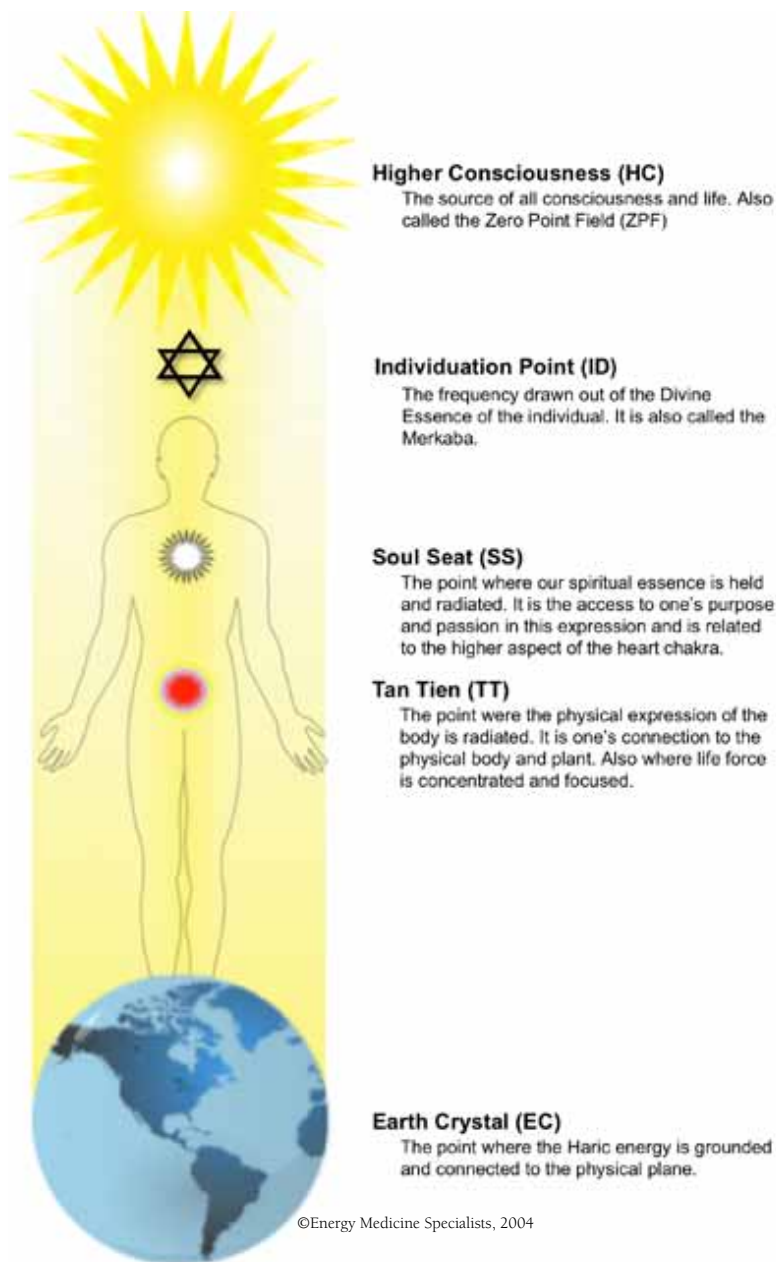
Another patient nearing end-of-life that Donna works with, who has terminal breast cancer, requests weekly HT sessions to assist with management of pain, nausea, constipation, and anxiety as well as the dying/transition process. Donna provides sessions using a variety of HT interventions based on her assessment and the patient's needs at the time. The patient states that the sessions allow her to remove the "edge" she hadn't realized that she was carrying, and help her to relax, sleep, ease nausea, constipation, and pain. She also expresses that she feels so much love and a deeper spiritual connection through their time together.

### EOL Doulas

In addition to hospice care, there is now a growing field of people who guide and support the dying and their families through the labor of death. They are referred to as end-of-life (EOL) doulas, death doulas, or midwives of the soul (Fresko-Weiss, 2015, Preface xi). EOL Doulas have become the voice of the dying – they magnify hospice care while standing in the gap between medical and non-medical treatments. EOL Doulas help the dying person and their families create legacies, offer guided visualization and rituals, and provide vigil and respite support.

Melinda Chichester, HTCP/I, EOL Doula, is a Healing Touch Certified Practitioner/Instructor and EOL Doula who can assess and diagnose energy disturbances for those who are in transition. Melinda's advanced studies in the hara and chakra systems allow her to offer transformative support helping people as they encounter the dying process.

In her practice, Melinda views the hara as the transport system for the soul, supporting the dying person's unique energetic expression back to Divine source (see Figure 2. Hara Column). Barbara Brennan (2017) describes the hara as the foundation for the human energy field that plays a role in facilitating "our direct connection to the Godhead" and clarifying "one's life purpose and intention to incarnate" (p.6). The hara is thought to carry all of our lessons, traumas, contracts, and karma "for the evolution of our spirit in this lifetime" (Moll, 2014, p.2).



**Figure 2.** Hara Column (Moll, 2004), courtesy of Energy Medicine Specialists (EMS), Highlands Ranch, CO.

Melinda shares an experience of how energy medicine and Healing Touch supported her dying patient:

*In October 2018, I was approached by a client (TL) who needed additional energetic and spiritual support for her brother (GL). GL was admitted to hospice in April 2018, with a diagnosis of Frontotemporal Dementia. As an EOL Doula and energy medicine practitioner, I am trained to obtain a client history, signed consent, and disclosure forms. During the initial intake, TL shared that her brother suffered a significant trauma in 1987 when his son was murdered at the age of 23. TL shared some of her frustration with her brother's care.*

*Since April, GL had been screaming out if he was hungry, tired, soiled, or agitated. GL's shouting out became*

*continued on page 26*

a disruption to the staff and residence. It was also causing agitation in TL while she visited with her brother. TL and I discussed how Healing Touch and energy medicine interventions could support GL's mind, body, and spirit during his decline. We also talked about medication options she could discuss with the hospice RN. I also helped TL identify that her brother was over-stimulated while eating his meals out in the resident common area, which was resulting in sensory overload.

GL's first HES assessment expressed no flow or vitality in all aspects of his energy systems: the hara, chakras, energy field, and meridians. To release the trauma (e.g., his son's murder) from GL's hara, I offered the Hara Re-patterning Technique (Moll, 2014, p.8). After the technique, GL was deeply relaxed and calm. The post-assessment indicated all energy systems were clear, opened, balanced, and flowing.

I met with TL and her brother for the next seven weeks, offering EOL Doula support and Healing Touch interventions to relieve GL's agitation. Because of the continued energy support, GL was able to gracefully and sacredly approach his death. The Chakra Spread was offered twice when GL began the active stages of dying. One of the greatest aspects of my work as a Doula is helping the family identify the symbolic language the dying person is trying to communicate during the dying process. GL shared some intimate emotions with his sister, letting her know he was happier in spirit than in his physical body.

"Death is still a fearful, frightening happening for many people, and the fear of death is a universal fear even if we think we have mastered it on many levels" (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p.5). Introducing energy medicine modalities such as Healing Touch at end-of-life provides an opportunity for the dying person and their families to transform fear into thoughts and feelings of acceptance, peace, gratitude, and beauty.

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**Donna M. Adams, RN, OCN, CHPN, HTCPI/I** holds nursing certification in the fields of oncology and hospice and palliative care. She is a Healing Touch Certified Practitioner and Instructor with more than 18 years of experience practicing Healing Touch. Donna has a passion for incorporating energy medicine therapies as an integrative approach in conjunction with traditional medicine and care. One of her greatest joys is to bring light to the world through teaching and sharing the gifts of energy medicine practices. She is published in Energy Magazine, Healing Touch Community News and was a 2016 contributing writer for Sybil Magazine.



**Melinda Chichester, HTCPI, EOL Doula**, is a Healing Touch Certified Practitioner, Instructor, Mentor, and End-of-Life (EOL) Doula. Her focus is to release trauma within the human energy system while supporting one's life journey. Melinda is a death educator focusing on the physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and energetic aspects of the dying process. She is a self-starter with high enthusiasm and strives to motivate people and educate the community on the benefits of self-care. She is published in Energy Magazine and was a 2017-2018 contributing writer for Sybil Magazine.



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