



Reiki and Workplace Stress

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WORKING IN A VOCATION we feel called to is a wonderful situation! The right job lets us share our passions, positively contribute to the world and energizes us for tomorrow. Unfortunately, many of us may be working in a job where we feel stuck, overwhelmed, or unhappy. Depending on the workplace, there may also be stressors like long hours, pressure to do more with less, unclear communication, or poor leadership. Constant stress can keep our “fight or flight” system in overdrive. This in turn drains our balancing “rest and digest” system.¹ It’s fortunate we have Reiki to help us cope with the physical, emotional and mental effects of stress. With a combined 55 years in healthcare and corporate environments, we have extensive personal and professional experience with workplace stress. In this article, we will share some facts about the negative effects of stress, and how we can address those problems through Reiki.

Workplace Stress Data

Chronic workplace stress affects employees in the physical, emotional, intellectual and behavioral areas (see Table 1). Employee Assistance Program (EAP) data show that two-thirds of employees report difficulty focusing at work due to stress.² With information like this, a growing number of workers and their employers are realizing how deeply stress affects them. The root cause of damaging stress in the body is inflammation. This can appear as an increase in the deadly four—heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and cancer. Other problems linked with stress and inflammation are adrenal exhaustion, sleep disturbances, stress ulcers, chronic constipation, pituitary disorders and weight gain (especially the dangerous “belly fat”).³ **Robin:** I don’t know what people do without Reiki. As a healthcare professional, doing daily self-Reiki and having the ability to reset my “fight or flight” and “rest and digest” systems has literally been life-saving!

Table 1 – Effects of Workplace Stress on Employees⁴

- **Physical** - sleep disturbances, headaches, GI upset, hypertension, heart disease
- **Emotional** - anxiety, irritability, depression, emotions up and down
- **Intellectual** - poor concentration, lack of motivation, memory and thought process difficulties, poor decision-making
- **Behavioral** - substance misuse, isolation, tardiness, poor behavior toward others

Employee stress also impacts the operations of the place of employment (see Table 2), resulting in huge costs for the employer. Information from the World Health Organization states that “stress costs American businesses up to \$300 billion yearly.”⁵

Bryce: I have a twenty-year background in Information Technology and Project Management, giving me first-hand experience of how stress affects employees, including me.

Table 2 – Effects of Workplace Stress on Organizations⁶

- High absenteeism
- High labor turnover rate
- Poor timekeeping
- Increased employee complaints
- Poor performance and productivity
- Low morale
- Poor motivation
- Increased ill-health and accident/incident reports

Healthcare Stress and Its Impacts

Robin: I worked in traditional healthcare for over 30 years. I have seen the effects of stress listed in the tables above with my experiences as a practitioner, teacher and manager. However, I am very concerned that the negative effects of stress on caregivers can result in the injury of patients. Patient injury increases stress on the patient and family, and the cost of care, especially if it leads to additional treatments or a lawsuit.

Data from Employee Assistance Programs serving healthcare workers have found they make the highest numbers of anxiety-related calls to the program when compared to other groups of workers.⁷ This study also found that healthcare workers experience more negative impacts on their health than the general population. They have a 9% higher usage of medical care, higher drug costs, and higher hospital admission rates for obesity (46%), depression (20%) and asthma (12%).⁸

In addition to anxiety and health issues, burnout and compassion fatigue also impact hospital workers at a high rate. Today, nurses are working 12-hour shifts and are responsible for more patients. The patients are also sicker than they were 10 years ago. These stressors have increased the likelihood of burnout (see Table 3).⁹ In this study, burnout levels were high; 49% for nurses under 30 and 40% for nurses over age 30.

**Table 3 – Sources of Burnout
(emotional exhaustion and withdrawal)¹⁰**

- Lack of social support
- Inability to control one’s own schedule
- Chaotic job
- Work-life imbalance
- Working on understaffed team
- Cumulative effects if not dealt with

Compassion fatigue develops in healthcare workers under the strain of traumatic and difficult situations. This can produce feelings of hopelessness and a decrease in the ability to find pleasure in life. Sleeplessness and nightmares, a negative attitude, feelings of incompetence and self-doubt creep in. Problems focusing can happen, increasing the risk for errors and patient injury. Compassion fatigue affects the worksite as well. Hospital routines are disrupted due to absenteeism, high turnover rates and friction among employees, staff and management.¹¹

However, hospitals also create stress for their individual workers. The rallying cry of hospital administrations for at least the last ten years has been “do more with less” or “work smarter, not harder.” This has actually intensified stress for healthcare workers, as I can attest to this. When I moved to Bend, Oregon over eight years ago, my life was overly stressed both personally and professionally. Yet I could not find a way to change the situation quickly enough to keep the strain from exhausting me and making me a bit crispy around the edges—and I was trying to work and live smarter! From this experience, it is clear to me that there is a limit to what an individual can do before stress starts affecting health and performance.

It is also evident that shifting to being well takes deliberate effort on the part of employee and employer. Many hospitals are self-insured and healthcare costs are rising, hospital administrators are recognizing the importance of their employees’ well-being and looking for ways to improve it. That’s where Reiki comes in. It can be one of the first steps towards wellness—by appropriately addressing chronic, unseen, continuous stress.

Convincing Administration About Reiki

We need to find ways to convince the healthcare and other corporate systems to listen. Although Reiki is used in over 800 hospitals nationwide, it is primarily used for outpatient oncology clinics.¹² However, hospital employees also need to be trained in Reiki to enhance their wellness, decrease sick time and improve their ability to care compassionately for the patients.

It helps to read some medical literature about Reiki and learn “medical-ease,” the language that health professionals speak. This

approach helps us understand and present the scientific information we have about Reiki in a knowledgeable way. A good first step is to review the last five-to-ten years-worth of issues of the *Reiki News Magazine* for articles on this topic.¹³ Then check out the website of the Center for Reiki Research¹⁴ and/or do a Google search on the topic. The Center for Reiki Research’s publication has an article suggesting the following when working in a hospital setting:

- Present a professional image
- Cultivate relationships and support of key people
- Respect boundaries¹⁵

Here is an example of scientific language to catch the attention of healthcare workers.

Robin: In my 2015 *Reiki News Magazine* article on stress, I talked about the importance of working with the “fight or flight” and “rest and digest” systems.¹⁶ Together these two systems make up what is called the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) in “medical-ease.” As observed in pilot studies, Reiki positively affects this part of your brain (the ANS) by:

- Significantly decreasing heart rate and diastolic blood pressure¹⁷
- Enhancing the “rest and digest” or parasympathetic nervous system¹⁸

Using information from the medical literature to make your case while presenting is helpful too. For example, pilot studies have shown that:

- Nurses who learned Reiki and practiced it lowered their work-related stress¹⁹
- Reiki reduced burnout among community mental health clinicians²⁰
- Reiki significantly reduced psychological stress for as long as one year²¹
- Reiki used for patients undergoing knee replacement showed significant reductions in pain, high blood pressure, respiration rate and anxiety²²

Beyond studies, promoting Reiki well-being involves convincing the hospital administration or company how easy it is for employees to learn Reiki. It can support them daily as an additional step to wholeness. Teaching Reiki to healthcare professionals is a way to empower them to increase the positive impact they have on the people they care for daily. In your workplace, you could become an example by finding ways to include Reiki in your workday (see Table 4):

Table 4 – Ways to Use Reiki at Work

- Take a five-minute “Reiki Break” every hour
- Reiki your work area at the beginning of the day: cubicle, phone, computer, any place you’re spending time
- Send Reiki ahead to meetings to improve results and collaboration
- Reiki your tasks, food and water for the highest good
- Have mini-Reiki sessions with co-workers
- Embody the Five Reiki Ideals “Just for Today”

Reiki for Well-Being Programs

In order to increase these positive results at the workplace, it makes sense to establish Reiki for Well-Being programs that offer regular Reiki sessions to employees as a stress management tool. When chronic stress is managed effectively, employee performance increases, absenteeism is reduced and morale improves. A reduction in doctors’ visits and prescription costs can reduce the insurance premiums paid by a company. Fewer employees would choose to leave due to high stress, preventing the company’s loss of their former employees knowledge base. A company also avoids the months or years of time and salaries needed to replace and train new employees.

Bryce: To successfully launch a workplace Reiki program, you must be able to explain the true cost of stress on company operations. In my work experience, I saw that many employees regularly worked more than 50 hours a week. They were overwhelmed in a hopeless attempt to keep up with assigned tasks. The amount of re-work and errors continued to increase, while customer satisfaction decreased. I believe our engineering teams seemed to break two items for every one software fix we made. High-performing employees were leaving due to the high stress. Additional stress was added in the months it took to hire and train new employees. We had no in-office wellness programs for employees. While there were “off-hours” wellness incentives, many employees were too tired to use them.

My first corporate Reiki program happened accidentally. A Reiki client asked if I would come to her company to help with problems they were having. Acme²³ was a small office with 32 employees. Many of them were unhappy with their jobs. They had a large amount of manufacturing re-work due to employee mistakes. Employee absenteeism was leading to additional manufacturing problems and increased payouts in insurance claims.

Setting the Stage for a Reiki for Well-Being Program

I created a potential Reiki for Well-Being Program at Acme that combined my corporate experience, Reiki knowledge and empowerment-facilitator training. The program was tailored to the language and expectations of the corporate world. It was a

results-driven model, showing how Reiki could increase employee satisfaction, lower costs and create a more harmonious work environment. Then I needed some help to gain management and employee acceptance.

One of the best ways to get in the door of a workplace is by having a Champion pave the way. The Champion is anyone who works for the company, has a good reputation, and speaks up about things that work in his or her life. Your Champion also knows the value of Reiki first-hand, either from previous Reiki sessions (offered at no cost, if needed) or Reiki training. At Acme, my client became the program Champion. The role of the Champion is to connect you to key decision-makers or their staff by giving you instant credibility in the company. Ideally, your Champion is a member of the leadership/management team who can help you secure the meeting time for a professional Reiki for Well-Being presentation. Attendance is based on who has input affecting employee wellness in the office. It’s common to have a few members of the management team, a Human Resources representative, and if one exists, the Employee Satisfaction Committee. Your presentation should be no more than 30–45 minutes of material, including at least 15 minutes for questions. I generally speak for 30 minutes and answer questions for 30 minutes.

Over time I’ve learned to start meetings at a high level, to offer information in bullet points and to focus on the benefits to the company. I define stress, detail its physical and emotional effects, speak about the damage caused by long-term chronic stress and then offer an overview of Reiki and its benefits. (You can also offer other modalities like breath work, yoga, mindful movement or meditation, but try not to overwhelm people with too many details at this first meeting.) I conclude my presentation with the benefits of the well-being program I’ve created for the company and offer a free Reiki session (or two) to the people who will be making the decision. At a minimum, I arrange for them to experience a 20-minute chair Reiki session in the office. The goal of the initial meeting is to gain trust and schedule a second, in-depth meeting.

It’s okay to be scared in the meeting room—I was terrified the first time I presented information on Reiki for Well-Being. But I kept my focus on the goal, remembering how terrible I felt at work—even remembering the day I thought that I was having a heart attack in the office. I knew I wanted to do whatever I could so others wouldn’t feel that way. Reiki was the way to achieve a better quality of life in the office.

Once the “decision-makers” have experienced Reiki for themselves, I ask for approval of a pilot program. Over time, I have become prepared for objections. “No” or “we don’t have time” are the ones I get most often. When I hear objections or resistance, I always reply with, “I know this will take some time, but take a moment to think about your employees. Are they happy? Are

they overworked? What's your attrition rate? How about absenteeism? Are you meeting your quality goals? Are your customers satisfied? How much are you spending on insurance claims? I think the real question is how can you NOT find time to start a pilot program with me?"

A pilot program is a small-scale, short-term test where the Reiki for Well-Being program is offered to a small number of employees. The goal is to show management the positive benefits of regular Reiki treatments in the workplace. Here are a few factors to consider when starting a pilot program:

- How sessions will be scheduled (eg., bi-weekly, 20-minute sessions)
- The number of employees receiving Reiki sessions (eg., six)
- Program length (eg., 90 days)
- The goals of the program (eg., lower absenteeism, increase satisfaction)

Creating a Reiki for Well-Being Program Contract

Acme agreed to the pilot program. I drew up a contract to ensure both parties knew what to expect, and clearly stated the information we agreed to. The contract included these details:

- The goals of the pilot program
- Clearly stated dates and timeframes for the Reiki sessions
- Feedback would be received from employees at the end of the program
- A 90-day review of the data collected with members of management
- What I would provide; what the company would provide; I brought portable music, arrived and left at specified times and worked with Acme's receptionist to schedule appointments; Acme provided a conference room with chairs and water, time for sessions "on the clock," and most importantly, management support
- Permission to share data results with other companies. Acme didn't want its name mentioned but agreed that I could share the pilot program data anonymously

The Program in Action

It will take at least 60 days (90 days preferred) or four sessions to document noticeable change. At Acme, we started with a 90-day program. The four participating employees received a 20-minute chair Reiki session every two to three weeks. The goals we agreed upon were reducing office stress, decreasing production mistakes and reducing unscheduled absences from sickness. We agreed on how to measure each of the goals—I requested information from the previous two quarters and the same quarter from the previous year. These numbers would provide our starting point.

During the pilot program, I suggest offering your services to the company for free, or at a greatly reduced cost. Since Acme was my first program, I was willing to donate my time to get data I could share with others. I knew this data would be very important. I wanted to create custom programs for larger companies and knew many of them would only participate if they saw proven results. (See table below for the results of our 90-day review.)

Feedback offered by employees and management at the conclusion of the pilot program:

- "Instead of getting upset, I talk to my manager when something goes wrong."*
- "It's easier to focus on my job after Reiki."*
- "I don't get angry at my co-workers like I used to."*
- "I don't call in sick with migraines."*
- "Everyone is in a better mood."*
- "We've seen improved manufacturing quality, a happier team and less absenteeism."*

After the pilot program ended, Acme began a regular Reiki for Well-Being Program, which also included breath work and mindful movement. Twelve employees are participating in the new program, and I'm being compensated for my time.

Conclusion

Bryce: So what have I learned from Acme? It's important to customize the presentation information for each company you speak to; with time and persistence, companies see how in-office wellness

Reiki Pilot Program for Acme

Goal	Day 1 Data	Day 90 Data
Reduce Office Stress	9 on a scale of 1–10; employees completed a ten-question survey	2.5 on a scale of 1–10; employees repeated the initial survey
Reduce Manufacturing Mistakes	55 errors per 1000 units for the Reiki Program employees	10 errors per 1000 units for the Reiki Program employees
Reduce Absenteeism	20 sick days total for employees in the Reiki Program	5 sick days total for employees in the Reiki Program

has a direct benefit on employee health and satisfaction. You must be willing to make adjustments in the program when something isn't working. Keep management and the Champion involved. Their engagement will help quickly resolve any concerns. Speak confidently about the benefits of Reiki; if you don't sound certain that Reiki can help, then they'll assume it can't. Start in smaller offices. It's generally easier to get a decision. Larger companies take longer to get started because so many people are involved in the decision-making process. Review your results every 90 days, not before. It takes time to see results. Continue to gather information based on the established goals. Information and results are critical to success and launching new Reiki programs at larger companies.

Robin: I have learned a successful Reiki program must continue to have supportive management and an engaged Champion. Sometimes that support comes to an end, but it is important to keep an open mind even then. For example, in the 1990s, a hospital had an active "Healing Healthcare" philosophy that was championed by the president/CEO until her retirement in 2003.²⁴ Additional Champions were the director of nursing, who also retired a few years later, and a nurse educator. For a decade, their support resulted in a non-medication-related approach for pain and anxiety involving Therapeutic Touch, Reiki and breath work training for nurses to use with patients. The focus shifted with subsequent administrations from the nurses in the hospital to the outpatient oncology clinic and use of Reiki volunteers. New Champions were found within the oncology center, data were gathered and presented and that Reiki program is still flourishing.²⁵ If your Champion is leaving, work with her to find a new Champion. Share your program results and ask for her support.

Robin and Bryce: The last point is one that makes sense to do no matter where you are, and certainly at work: always share Reiki benefit and personal stories with anyone and everyone who might be stressed—they could be a prospective client! 



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Endnotes

- ¹ Robin H. Fuerst, "Understanding the Effects of Stress and How Reiki Can Help, Part 1," *Reiki News Magazine*, Spring 2015; Part 2, Summer 2015.
- ² The American Institute of Stress, www.stress.org/workplace-stress/.
- ³ www.admin.com.ac.uk/offices/hr/policy/stress/effects.html.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ <http://truvenhealth.com/media-room/press-releases/detail/prid/147/hospital-employees-are-less-healthy-more-likely-to-be-hospitalized-than-the-general-workforce>.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ www.childrenshospitals.org/newsroom/childrens-hospitals-today/issue-archive/issues/fall-2014/articles/how-to-help-employees-cope-with-stress-and-burnout
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² www.centerforreikiresearch.org
- ¹³ For an inventory of all past issues of the *Reiki News Magazine* and a listing of the articles, go to www.reikiwebstore.com/SearchResult.cfm?CategoryID=42. Some back issues are available for sale on the website.
- ¹⁴ www.centerforreikiresearch.org; see especially *Center for Reiki Research Booklet* and "Reiki in Hospitals" (Power Point presentation).
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Fuerst, "Understanding the Effects of Stress."
- ¹⁷ Nicola Mackay, Stig Hansen, and Oona McFarlane, *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 10, no. 6 (March 2005): 1077–1081, doi.org/10.1089/acm.2004.10.1077.
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²¹ Adina Goldman Shore, “Long-Term Effects of Energetic Healing on Symptoms of Psychological Depression and Self-Perceived Stress,” *Alternative Therapies* 10, no. 3 (May/June): 42–48, http://www.equilibrium-e3.com/images/PDF/Effects%20of%20Energetic%20Healing%20on%20Depression%20and%20Stress_web.pdf.

²² Ann Linda Baldwin, “Effects of Reiki on Pain, Anxiety, and Blood Pressure in Patients Undergoing Knee Replacement: A Pilot Study,” *Holistic Nursing Practice* 31, no. 2 (March/April 2017): 80–89, doi: 10.1097/HNP.000000000000195.

²³ Acme is the pseudonym of a North Carolina company. They have allowed results of a Reiki for Well-Being Pilot Program to be publicly shared.

²⁴ Rosemary Johnson and Robin Fuerst, “Reiki at St. Charles Cancer Center,” *Reiki News Magazine* Spring 2011.

²⁵ www.stcharleshealthcare.org/Our-Services/Cancer-Care/Integrative-Therapies.