

QUERY

Letter to the Editor concerning “The impact of Reiki practice on episiotomy recovery and perineal pain: A randomized controlled study”

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I am writing to express concern with the paper "The impact of Reiki practice on episiotomy recovery and perineal pain: A randomized controlled study."¹ In this paper, a researcher employed reiki to purportedly bring about beneficial effects. Proponents of reiki claim that in reiki, some form of “universal life energy” flows from the practitioner to the patient to bring about healing. However, this claim is not recognized by science. Physics knows of no such "energy," nor have proponents been able to demonstrate its existence. Reiki is considered utter pseudoscience by the scientific community.

For example, Dr. Edzard Ernst, the most accomplished researcher and research critic in the field of complementary and alternative medicine, wrote: "Amongst all the many forms of so-called alternative medicine (SCAM), Reiki is perhaps the most ridiculous scam."² Dr. Stephen Barrett, another expert, wrote, "Reiki has no substantiated health value and lacks a scientifically plausible rationale."³ Dr. Steven Novella wrote, "We now have at least a century of scientific research that has failed to find any clue that such a mysterious life force or life energy exists. It cannot be detected, measured or confirmed in any way".⁴

However, the paper did not mention the lack of credibility of reiki among scientists, or even suggest that reiki is at all controversial. This represents a serious deficiency in the background information given to readers of the paper.

Any alleged benefits of reiki in this paper were almost certainly due to factors other than

effects of the alleged “universal energy.” The treatment group received a great deal of attention, including touch to various places on the body, while nothing special was done for the control group. The expectation that reiki would bring about benefits, along with the extra care, could account for any differences in the self-reported pain levels between groups. Concerning other outcomes, it appears that all data were collected by the researcher who also administered reiki, so some bias could have been introduced. However, the authors did not even discuss these possibilities.

To summarize, this paper utilized an implausible therapy, and the results are far more likely to be explained by the caring attention to patients and possible bias in evaluation than by forms of "energy" unrecognized by science. The authors mentioned neither the scientific difficulties behind reiki nor the possibility of mundane rival explanations for the outcomes. The reviewers and editors should not have approved this paper for publication.

In the future I urge you not to publish any papers claiming benefits from reiki. If you do choose to publish such papers, you should insist that the authors acknowledge the scientific improbability of reiki, and that they provide tight controls for effects independent of reiki.

By publishing papers such as this, you promote the uncritical adoption of unscientific practices such as reiki and other forms of "energy medicine."

Note: I have criticized three other recent papers concerning reiki.⁵⁻⁷ Because some of the flaws in those papers are the same as in Aydermir et al.,¹ there is some overlap in the language used in this letter and the previous ones.

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