

The Power of Guided Imagery & Therapeutic Touch

What if you could launch yourself into a stratosphere of physical wellness merely on the wings of Thought and Touch? It's not so far out, you know, not when you consider the dynamics of each.

Consider the power of touch. Soothing, calming, medicinal. Nothing beats the feel-good energy of a hug, a sweet caress, the kind touch of a hand. Now consider the power of imagery. It's been said that one thought has more power than it takes to send a rocket to the moon! Both of these powerhouses, specifically therapeutic touch and guided imagery, can potentially pack a positive punch with it comes to our well being. So powerful, in fact, that Martine Busch, M.A., the Director of the Van Praag Instituut in Holland, has devoted her Institute to bringing these forms of therapy to the forefront of complementary care in the Netherlands and beyond. And in April, Busch is bringing her expertise to the Triad to share insights into these healing techniques.

"My goal is to contribute to a better health care system, specifically by bringing in the aspect of the mind, of consciousness and energy. Only then, can holistic health be obtained."

Enter Therapeutic Touch (TT). In a nutshell, it's a form of complementary care in which the patient's energy field is brought into balance. This is done through the practitioner's hands using a specific method to harmonize the energy. In TT, it is assumed that the patient's vital energy is out of balance or distorted, resulting in the manifestation of symptoms like illness, fatigue, pain and weakness. In Therapeutic Touch, the disturbance in energy flow is addressed, treated, and ideally, re-



Martine Busch, M.A.
Director of the Van Praag Instituut, Holland

stored.

"The practitioner's hands direct the energy...merely trying to dissolve the blockages in order to support the flow to return to its natural strength and vitality. In doing this, the self-healing capacity of the body is enhanced."

"Many nurses practice Therapeutic Touch in their work. We invested a lot of time and energy in helping them do so. The Van Praag Institute, which we founded to introduce Therapeutic Touch, hosts a Therapeutic Touch network of 700-800 nurses who give Therapeutic Touch workshops and lectures to their colleagues."

Therapeutic Touch is now practiced in all kinds of health care facilities in the Netherlands: burn centers, neonatology wards, psychiatric hospitals, nursing homes (mainly Alzheimer patients), hospices, etc."

Despite the introduction of this therapy to hospitals in Holland, Busch says TT is still controversial. *"Many doctors don't understand the energy concept, which they don't get acquainted with in their formal training – but I think we succeeded in introducing it into mainstream care. Many nurses practice it within their nursing profession, there are policies and procedures and Therapeutic Touch is being discussed at many conferences and other platforms of nursing."*

Therapeutic Touch is not restricted to health care professionals. Busch says it involves a systematic method that safely can be used at home—with roommates, sick relatives and others. Volunteers in nursing homes, home care or hospice centers may follow a TT course plan. Research suggests it can be effective in treating anxiety, pain, and wound healing, as well as increasing general well being and quality of life.

"For many patients and Therapeutic Touch practitioners alike, Therapeutic Touch is a very intimate process. I think this is because you connect at a deeper level with each other and therefore it is healing to the practitioner as well. Being really connected to somebody else, being completely free from the pressure of time and distracting thoughts, just being in the moment together is something every person should be able to experience every now and then. It is very reassuring and makes you feel really alive."

"Teaching Therapeutic Touch for me is very close to my pedagogical work: it helps people experience their potential."

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Students always refer to Therapeutic Touch as bringing them new experiences, saying, 'I never felt anything like this! I never thought I would be able to feel the energy field!' And I love to offer things like centering and tools to feel connected to others."

Centering is key. Busch describes TT as a 5-step process. The first step is centering, which is "The most important and the most difficult of the whole intervention. Centering means collecting your intention, mindfulness, finding a place of inner peace. Dora Kunz, a founder of Therapeutic Touch and well known healer, always said that 'the energy thing' is not the difficult part of Therapeutic Touch, but centering is. Centering presupposes self discipline; it is a kind of mental training, a form of practical meditation. Not easy to keep doing on a regular basis, but essential in that it helps you to connect on a more subtle level with the patient/receiver, to sense the quality of the energy field and to not attach to the outcome of the treatment."

So what does Therapeutic Touch feel like? "People often experience this energy flow as a 'tingling' sensation with deep relaxation as a result. One patient with lung cancer referred to it as 'dropping out of a vacuum wrapping', being able to breathe freely again. Another patient who suffered from breast cancer and lost one breast said that for the first time since her illness she felt 'whole and complete' again. Others say they feel really cared for, supported and safe to go 'inside' and find their personal place of inner rest and peace."

Another form of healing that offers similar results is guided imagery. Known at the Van Praag Institute as 'Healthy Imagination', this therapy is super convenient because you can apply it yourself—anywhere, on your own time—to reduce stress, unrest, pain and more. Not known as a cure, but a symptom tamer, guided imagery an easy and effective method of self-care Busch firmly stands behind.

"Introducing Therapeutic Touch was not easy because the idea of an energy field is very far out for western trained professionals. So after a few years, we decided to start with another modality, but this time one that would be easier to understand: guided imagery. This is a mind body therapy for which there is not only a lot of evidence in terms of the effects, but with MRI scans we can also show beautifully that the brain is reacting to something you imagine in pretty much the same way it does when your eyes see something in the 'real world'. The same holds true for movement: if you move your arm, your motor cortex will light up, being activated. When you merely imagine moving your arm, the same area is stimulated. So this means that just thinking intently of something alters the neural pathways in your brain and directly affects your body."

In other words, guided visualization is a method in which you use your own imagination to reduce symptoms and promote health. It is based on the fact that the body cannot distinguish between something you imagine and something you really do. Busch believes guided imagery is a "fantastic tool" for use in self management and self healing. She says patients can even use it to prepare themselves for surgery, with research affirming

they will be more relaxed and recover a lot faster. The Van Praag Institute has developed a series of guided imagery CDs for specific health issues including chronic pain, chemotherapy, and heart surgery. They are in use in hospitals today.

"It is very easy to convince doctors that patients who use guided imagery will be better off. And for them guided imagery is much easier to offer to patients than Therapeutic Touch, because they only have to hand them a CD—a concrete material thing—without the patients having to change themselves in terms of centering or connecting. It is just another kind of (big) pill."

A big pill with no pharmaceutical side effects.

Blast-off to well being with the rocket power of guided imagery and therapeutic touch. The potential to launch yourself to an altitude where well being soars may be as close as the touch of a hand, or a daydream-like visualization. The belief in the effectiveness of these powerhouse tools fuels the work of the Van Praag Instituut and the passion of its Director, Martine Busch, whose extensive background in psychology and energy healing prompts her to blaze new trails in health care.

"What I love about my work is trying to get something new done, something that helps people to reflect on their health (more than on having a disease) and discover their own healing capacity.

"For me it is also a challenge to find the right words and paths to reach doctors and administrators as well. They need more information and 'treatment' options. Maybe, what I like most—apart from what it brings me personally in terms of centering and compassionate care—is building bridges."

Want to know more? Martine Busch will be a guest speaker at the Natural Triad Health & Wellness Show on Saturday, April 10 at 1:00 PM. Details on page 33.

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