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"We have found a strange footprint on the shores of the unknown. We have devised profound theories, one after another, to account for its origins. At last, we have succeeded in reconstructing the creature that made the footprint. And lo!

It is our own."

— Sir Arthur Eddington,
Space, Time, and Gravitation, 1920





Energy Medicine

A Field of Potential

By Karrie Osborn

The “unknowns” of energy medicine are the aspects that make it seem unusual, unique, and — unquantifiable. The very things that make the work profound are also the things that have kept much of the medical establishment at arm’s length on this side of the world. Now, as science is slowly proving out what energy practitioners have always known about their work, traditional medicine is gingerly extending its hand. Will it be welcomed?

Both scientific research and anecdotal accounts tell us that the gentle giant we know as energy medicine has potential in every aspect of our being — from fighting addictions to healing trauma to balancing emotions and spirit. It can create structural change, and it can heal the oldest of psychic wounds. It gives only what you need, and its lessons can last a lifetime. This field of work has so much potential for

health and well-being, yet it struggles to find a proper place in the paradigm of Western medicine. Even as we watch energy medicine making its way into integrative medicine clinics and teaching hospitals, we still have to wonder are we witnessing the birth of a new, energy-friendly medical model, or watching a slow assimilation that promises a future more bleak?

From the traditions of 3,000-year-old therapies to their most recent energetic renderings, one wonders, can energy medicine fulfill its modern-day promise? Can it be part of a new health paradigm based on the premise of achieving wholeness? Can it survive in a world of traditional Western medicine, all while maintaining its heart and soul?

These are the questions we asked those in the trenches — the therapists, educators, authors, scientists, and doctors who are witnessing these changes up close and personal. Here’s what they had to say.

A Part of Us All

When we talk about energy medicine, reiki and Therapeutic Touch are often the first modalities that come to mind. But energy is evident in every modality on the bodywork tree. From Swedish massage to structural integration, energy is a part of the transaction between client and therapist, whether intended or not.

"All interactions can be described using energetic language, and most effects of touch have an energetic explanation, in addition to whatever physical explanations are offered," says John Chitty, co-founder of the Colorado School of Energy Studies in Boulder, Colo., and an important voice in the polarity therapy camp.

"Swedish massage has more energetic action going for it than the obvious electromagnetic circulation effect," he says. "We could also talk about the practitioner intention having a measurable effect of electromagnetic resistance in the tissues, the electromagnetic properties of muscle and especially connective tissue, and the electromagnetic field data processing capacity of connective tissue — energy anatomy that is being unknowingly contacted, among many others. So I think anyone who touches is doing energy work. They just may not know it."

Suzanne Nixon, author, educator, holistic psychotherapist, and somatic bodyworker, takes it a step further. "An exchange of energy is always happening between practitioner and client, whether conscious or unconscious. Whatever the type of massage, stroke, movement, or modality, energy is always being exchanged." She says the real question in her mind is, what is the intent of practitioner and the modality? "That sets the whole framework for the energy concept, and then that directs the whole session."

Today's Acceptance

Seeing is not always believing when it comes to things of the unknown. This is doubly true for a medical establishment trained to rely on the strictest science. When it comes to energy medicine, most allopathic practitioners think the case has yet to be made.

"There is little doubt that physicians have been exposed to, and some support, energy therapies," says Elliott Dascher, M.D., author of *Whole Healing: A Step-by-Step Program to Reclaim Your Power to Health*. "This is a definite shift from just a few decades ago. However, this is clearly a small minority clustered around major cities, integrative healthcare centers, and perhaps academic institutions."

Dascher says it will take time — a long time — to find real acceptance. "My sense is that the younger physicians entering medicine will have already been exposed to the alternative and complementary

approaches through both their cultural experience, perhaps their individual exploration, and in certain cases, through medical school teaching programs." These doctors, he says, will clearly be more open toward energetic approaches than those who've come before. "Yet, all who have gone through the rigors of medical training will relate the strong pressures to conform to the traditional approaches of 'modern science.'" Fully accepting energy therapies will be too big a pill for some, he says.

On the other side of the coin, there's Brian Dailey, M.D., an 18-year attending physician in emergency medicine at Rochester General Hospital in New York. "I can't keep up with the demand," he says. Dailey has incorporated energy medicine into his practice in tantamount ways. Reiki has been his biggest asset, especially in the emergency room, as well as with cancer and hospice patients. Reflexology, aromatherapy, sound, guided imagery, and massage are just some of the other healing tools he makes available to his patients. "We are open to all forms of healing." His goal is just to get people feeling good again.

Dailey says the hunger for energy medicine information is "phenomenal," taking him around the country and around the world to speak about it. He optimistically believes the battle to bring energy medicine into a traditional medical paradigm has already been won. "We are doing it now," he says.

It might be "baby steps," but Dailey is right. Change is occurring. For instance, in addition to seeing reiki in hospitals throughout the East and medical schools across the country offering rotations through complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) programs as part of the curriculum, one place energy therapies are showing up is in integrative medicine clinics. Some of these clinics are being opened by physicians trained out of places like Andrew Weil's Program for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona, a two-year residential fellowship program, the first of its kind in the country.

Growing at a tremendous rate, these integrative facilities are offering a melding of therapies for patients. Christine Gustafson, M.D., says as a graduate of Weil's program, she's found tremendous results with biofeedback, Therapeutic Touch, and meditation in her Alpharetta, Ga.-based integrative medicine practice. She says her patients are taking to it like water.

While many are eager to see these clinics be successful, others are reserving judgment until they see it in action. For Nixon, the concern is that today's energy workers will be thwarted under the power of such clinics. She's fearful practitioners will be lost in the mix, and so the depth of knowledge of their work will be lost, too. Physicians, trained briefly in energy techniques, won't have the expertise of those thoroughly

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knowledgeable of its intricacies and strengths. "I'm afraid they'll still follow the Western mind, and we'll move away from client-centered to protocol-centered," Nixon says. Either way, most agree these clinics might help pull the rest of the medical system toward a new, more holistic mind-set.

Concerns aside, Nixon says another aspect of what's brought energy medicine to this new level has been a change in the language. Twenty years ago, energy therapies were a novelty in the medical world and far from appreciated for the most part. Nixon describes that era of energy work as "flighty," "ungrounded," and too "New Agey." Today, it's described with the moniker energy medicine, a move Nixon says worked immediately to change the context of the work.

Case in point was a recent psychotherapy symposium she attended where energy medicine was a dominant theme, and people like neuroscientist Candace Pert were offering continuing education courses in energy psychology.

A big part of the contextual change came with the publication of James Oschman's book, *Energy Medicine: The Scientific Basis*, in 2000. In it, Oschman lays out a significant amount of historical research that supports

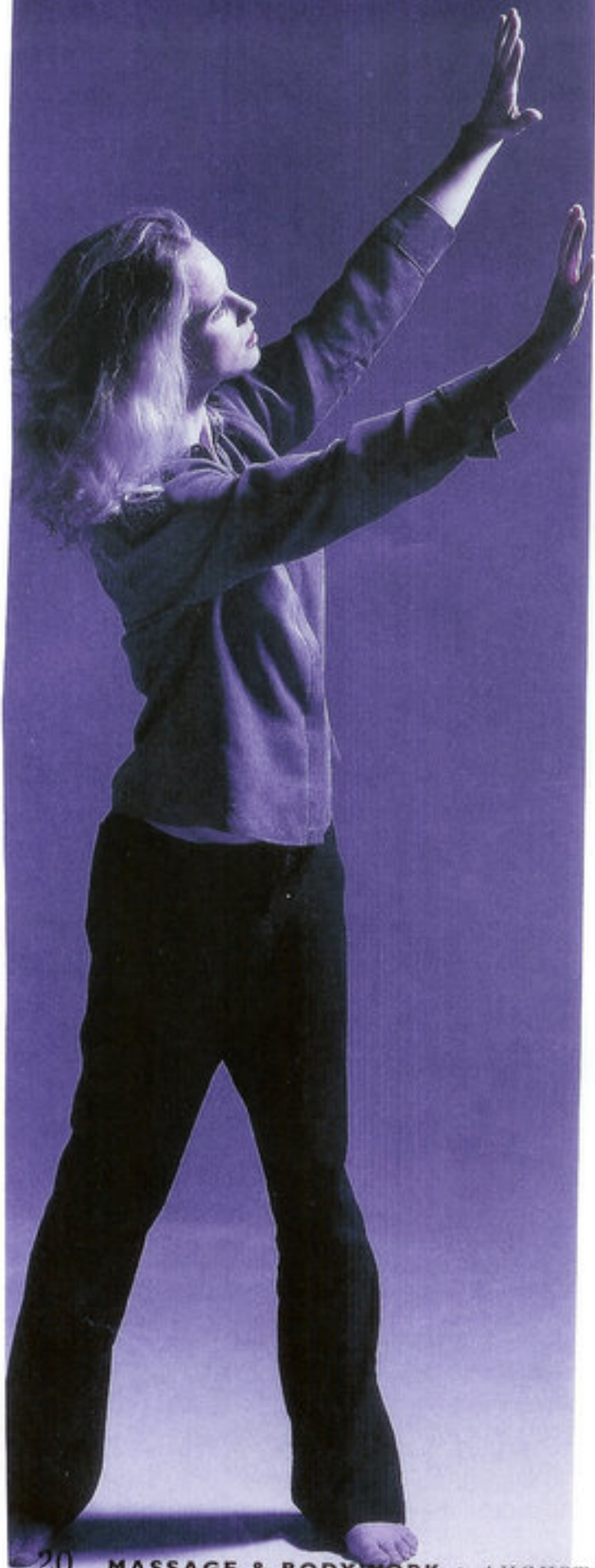
the legitimacy of energy therapies. The book, and his 2003 release, *Energy Medicine in Therapeutics and Human Performance*, have been heralded as extremely important contributions to the field of energy medicine.

"It helped doctors break through the 'woo woo' factor," Oschman says of his first book, which details the science of energy medicine. Today, doctors are ordering the book for themselves and their patients.

As the language has changed and become more grounded, energy medicine is being noticed in other arenas. Spas are including more energy therapies than in years past to answer consumer demand, says Hannelore Leavy, executive director of the Day Spa Association. Leavy sees spa owners keeping their therapy menus fresh by including adaptations of ancient modalities from a variety of cultures. No longer afraid to include lesser-known therapies, spas are doing it to keep up with the competition down the street.

That's OK by Leavy who appreciates the inclusion of therapies that address the total well-being of a person and not just our parts.

In addition to quietly making its way into a variety of health settings like spas and hospitals, energy medicine has benefitted from the endorsement of professional



athletes who have opened a door of acceptance. "The use of energy medicine in the athletic community is really proving how valuable it is," Oschman says, noting the success of one of America's favorite sons. Six-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong is working on his next victory and has no problem sharing the fact that his chiropractor/trainer Jeff Spencer uses energy therapies, including an Erchonia laser, for treating him and the rest of the team.

Where Do We Go Next?

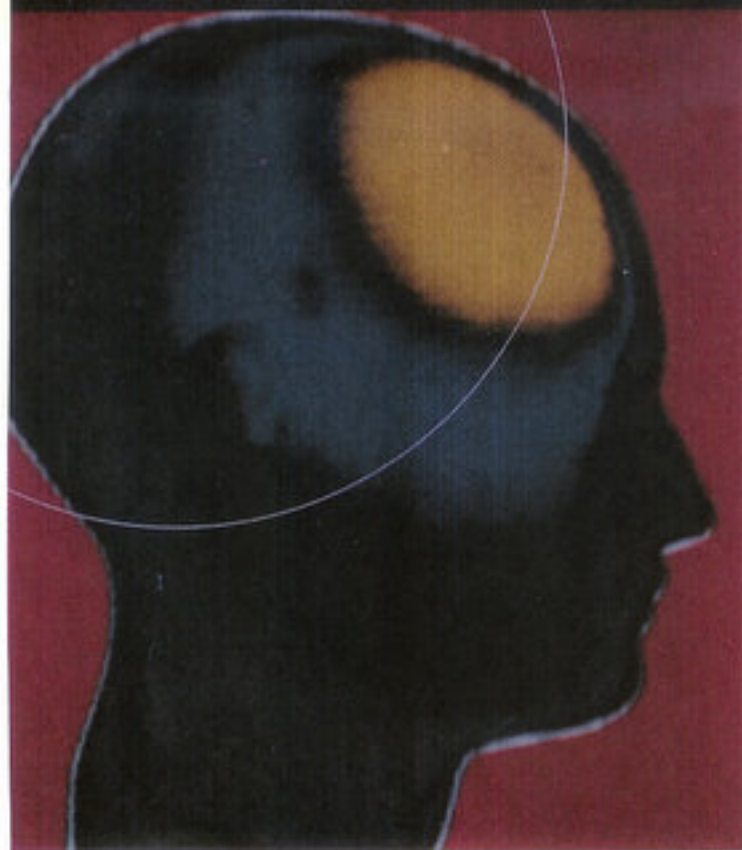
"If I were to measure future acceptance (of energy medicine) based on the feedback I receive from my colleagues in Georgia, I would be tempted to call the future bleak," says Gustafson, from her Georgia clinic. "Were I to measure it from the requests, reactions, and healing of my patients, I would say that nothing can stop it. As Hugo said, 'There is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time has come.'"

It's this very division between what is and what can be that prompts Oschman to remind us that patients, for the first time, are in the driver's seat when it comes to healthcare. While it might not seem that way, and while admittedly we're stuck in the middle of a health system that's disintegrating, he speaks more to a changing mindset that no longer has patients handing over their health to a medical demigod, as it's been for decades, or feeling a prisoner of the system. This finds correlation with David Eisenberg's 1998 landmark study that showed consumers spending up to \$47 billion on healthcare alternatives out of their own pockets.¹

Whether we can see it or not, there has also been a "huge shift" with doctors and their perceptions of healing, Oschman says. "Doctors are overwhelmed with paperwork, HMOs tell them they only have seven minutes to spend with each patient, they're disillusioned with the pharmaceutical industry, and they're frustrated." He says it's this constant barrage that has drawn some physicians to complementary therapies. "And they love it, because people are getting better." As a medical doctor, Dailey knows that all too well. That's why he's educating other doctors, here and abroad, about the power of reiki for healing potential.

Searching for a better means to health, as these doctors are doing, falls perfectly in line with the client-centered future Nixon dreams of, where patients make choices and take responsibility for their own health.

Nixon feels certain that one day soon, bodyworkers are going to be an integral part of the fields of psychology and psychiatry. "Energy medicine is becoming much more grounded because research is seeing the biochemical changes in the brain. That's what's changing the medical mind is that it's becoming research-based. We didn't know how to study it before." —♦



So if it's truly what we want, how do we push further to get energy medicine into the medical paradigm? Is it the research?

"In my opinion, the research has already been done," Oschman says. It's just a matter of weeding it out. The biological explanations of how energy medicine works has helped demystify the whole field of study, he says.

In the future, Oschman says we need to take a hard look at how we do that research. In addition to the slow, slumbering ways of big clinical trials, he says this traditional research is trying to take the individual out of the equation. That, he says, is going in the wrong direction. "We don't have time for it any more. It's too expensive, too time-consuming, and it just leads to ambiguous results." What do you really learn in the end? "Nothing about the human body and nothing about healing," he says.

As for what's coming down the road in the world of energy medicine, both Oschman and Chitty agree that the use of energetic devices is an up-and-coming trend. "What could be more energetic than putting electricity into the body," Oschman says. "Hundreds of physicians and chiropractors are using the technology of Carol McMakin." The micro-current electroacupuncture system of Darren Starwynn is making its way into esthetician offices, and new treatments for pain are coming out of Russia with a biofeedback

Down the Rabbit Hole

Like a first kiss, I will never forget my first experience with energy work. I had only been exposed to the massage and bodywork profession for one month before attending a polarity conference, in Colorado. I had done my homework, chosen the courses I wanted to attend, made myself familiar with the players and their work, and prepared myself for whatever I might be exposed to — or so I thought.

Energy pulsed through this conference, both in terms of the people it drew, the topics being discussed, and the environmental stage in which it was set. After experiencing everything from Biosonic Repatterning to experiential movement (where people both writhed and cried) to good, old-fashioned polarity, I indeed felt like I had tumbled down the rabbit hole. Once I'd swallowed that pill, I knew there was no going back.

What still amazes me today is that even with the skepticism ingrained in me during my years as a newspaper reporter, I felt immediately at home in this world of energy. Though I couldn't begin to understand all that I was witness to that weekend, I took away from the experience a vibrational energy that has stayed with me even today.

It really was a gift I was given — to be able to open my mind to the possibilities of energy even as I was only just discovering what effluage and tapotement were. I feel very fortunate that I was so quickly exposed to this aspect of bodywork. I believe it gave me a personal insight into the potential that exists in bodywork, and it certainly gave me a respect and appreciation for these therapies, even if I didn't understand them.

I think of the energy experiences I've had, I've witnessed, or I've written about since that first exposure. I vividly remember the reiki session where I had so much release, that barely hours later I felt as if I'd been to the chiropractor. I still recall the distinct visual images that swam through my quiet mind as my craniosacral therapist held my head in her hands.

When a dear family friend was given just a year to live after the discovery of an inoperable tumor, her daughter learned reiki training as a means to help them both traverse the difficult road ahead. While it helped with the dying woman's pain, it also created a peace between mother and daughter, as one lovingly nurtured the other through the stages of death.

It was hope that I felt when I wrote about a newly pregnant mother who, after learning her fiancé had been tortured and murdered, was able to rely on and be rescued by a house full of energy workers who had come to her side.

And when I placed my hand on the tummies of my newborn babies and watched them calm with my simple touch, I knew it was an instinctual application of energy held in the palm of every parent's hand.

In many ways, energy medicine is still very much a mystery to me. And then again, its intrigue, power, and potential create a warm, safe place to call home — a place where possibilities are endless, just like the rabbit hole itself.

— Karrie Osborn

“Energy is the real substance
behind the appearance of
matter and forms.”

— *Randolph Stone, D.O., founder of Polarity Therapy*

device called a Scenar. “With all the problems with pain medications and their side effects, this is a good time for pain devices,” Oschman says.

Chitty says the interest in energy devices will be something to watch. “Just as broken bones are mended better with a minute electrical current, I expect that the many researchers working in this area will find more and more interest in the same, simple devices that people can use at home or practitioners can have in their offices.”

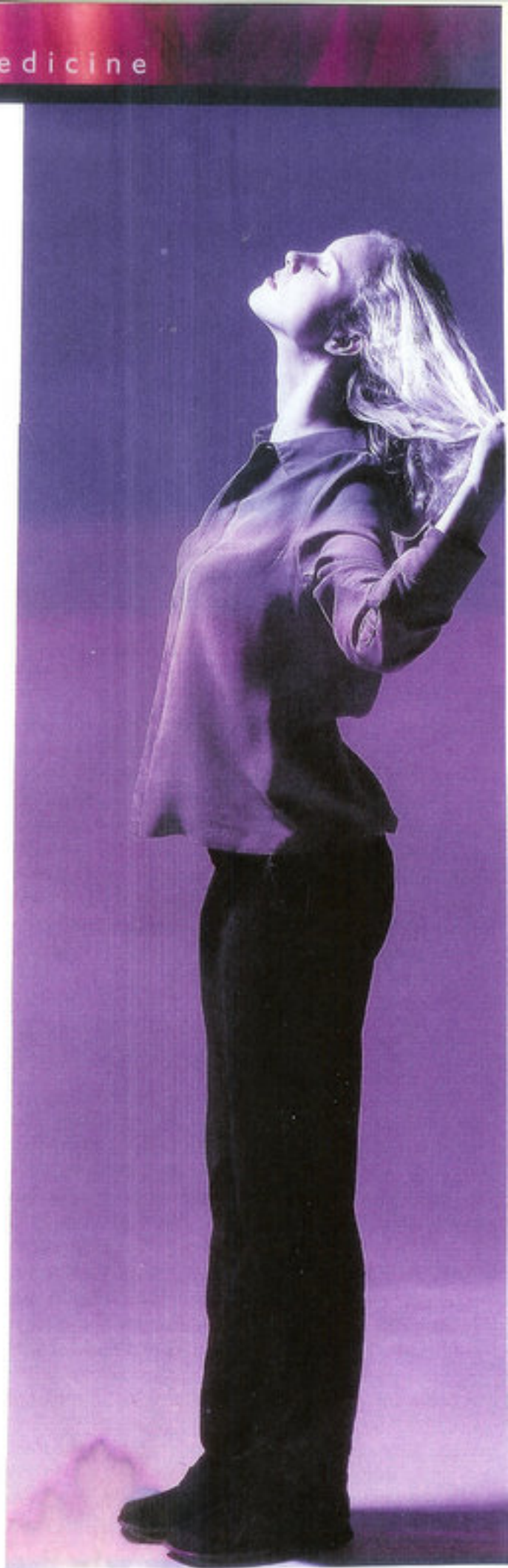
But are devices a threat to the therapist? Oschman doesn't think so. “A good energy therapist will look at the device and will be able to do the same thing.”

So what else is on the horizon? Chitty says there will continue to be a melding of therapies between different groups, such as Healing Touch, Therapeutic Touch, kinesiography, reiki, shiatsu, and craniosacral. “I think the energy practitioner of the future will have many methods from many sources.”

Nixon and Chitty both look to the future for a change in how energy medicine is taught. Chitty says in the long term, he expects there to be one emerging curriculum for energy work in which students will “gain a range of methods borrowed from many sources.” Then, he says, maybe the term “energy therapy” would take on a new meaning entirely.

Nixon is hopeful that in the future, when courses in anatomy and structure are taught in medical, psychology, and bodywork schools, the energetic system will be taught right alongside them. “We'd teach about the physical body and the energy body in all the schools of thought,” she says, just as they did 3,000 years ago in Eastern cultures. Then there would be no question about its legitimacy.

Finally, Chitty says, “at some point I expect that the energy medicine idea that healing can come from the inside out, instead of the outside in, will strike a popular chord.” The result will eventually be a greater acceptance by laypeople, he says, “leading to a decentralized non-medical thread of healthcare.”



Battling Cynics (and Neighbors)

While he believes it deserves a place there, Chitty is less optimistic than some about energy medicine's acceptance into a medical paradigm. There will undoubtedly be continued, grassroots word-of-mouth efforts to promote energy medicine, but he says cynics will do their best to discredit the work. "Energy work is effective, safe, and has no side effects for a host of conditions. However, I don't expect it to be widely accepted for numerous reasons, particularly economic and political. It's too effective and inexpensive."

Even though the science is there to prove the validity of energy work, Chitty says the skeptics will continue to deny it — loudly. And pseudo-scientists will continue to try to demean it.

"I think energy work will remain on the periphery, for folks who are looking for something different, often because they are not satisfied with the ineffectiveness, expense, and side effects of mainstream healthcare. Increasing dollars will continue to flow into energy work, but I think it will be non-mainstream for a long time."

Mainstream or not, Chitty is concerned about the threat facing polarity therapy and other forms of energy work. "The AMTA (American Massage Therapy Association) and its school owners are working to get all touch regulated as massage, and to make polarity therapy and other smaller modalities just a subset of massage," he says. This obviously doesn't sit well with those practicing energy medicine. "This means that their version of polarity would consist of a day or two of spa-friendly hand positions taught by some massage →

Energy Resources

Post-Graduate/Academic

- Consortium of Academic Health Centers for Integrative Medicine — www.imconsortium.org
- University of Arizona, Program for Integrative Studies — www.integrativemedicine.arizona.edu
- Institute of HeartMath — www.heartmath.org

Energy Schools

- Barbara Brennan School of Healing — www.barbarabrennan.com
- Colorado School of Energy Studies — www.energy-school.com
- Columbus Polarity Center for Integrated Health & Wellness — www.columbuspolarity.com
- EarthWalk School of Energy Healing — www.earthwalkschool.com
- Wakepoint School of Energy Healing — www.wakepoint.com
- World School of Massage & Holistic Healing Arts — www.worldschoolsf.com

Associations

- American Polarity Therapy Association — (produces a newsletter, *Energy*) www.polaritytherapy.org
- Healing Touch International — www.healingtouch.net
- International Foundation of Bio-Magnetics — www.justtouch.com
- International Society for the Study of Subtle Energies and Energy Medicine — (produces a magazine, *Bridges*) www.issseem.org
- The Reiki Alliance — www.reikialliance.com
- Zero Balancing Association — www.zerobalancing.com

Experts

- Joan Borysenko — www.joanborysenko.com
- Dolores Krieger — www.therapeutictouch.org
- Carolyn Myss — <http://myss.com>
- Suzanne Nixon — www.mindbodytherapy.org
- Candace Pert — www.candacepert.com
- James Oschman — www.energyresearch.bizland.com