

The Heart Speaks

By Mimi Guarneri, MD, FACC
New York: Touchstone, 2006
ISBN-13: 978-0-7432-7311-4.

I have a cherished signed copy of a profoundly moving book, *The Heart Speaks*, by Dr. Mimi Guarneri. She is a cardiologist who is a leader in integrative medicine. The current medical director of Scripps Integrative Medicine Center in La Jolla, California, she is well-known and highly regarded in the community of integrative physicians, healers, and leaders.¹

What is less well-known about her until now is her ability to evoke the deepest felt emotions of the heart with a turn of phrase, the delicately told story, the artful prose of narrative medicine. This book, part autobiography, part journey through the science of integrative cardiology is a must read for all those who have hearts. Not only does “Dr. G.” describe so well the high-tech side of modern interventional cardiology, she places it in a context that transcends the purely mechanistic with highly compelling, living metaphorical stories. Indeed, with the insight of a seasoned clinician, she weaves into her story themes that cannot be measured by EKG, angiography, CT, or nuclear scans.

These are the often unheard, unacknowledged contributors to heart disease. Grief over the death of a child or spouse; a lifelong pattern of hostility and anger, depression, and stress; and the support of religious and spiritual experience: all these play an important role in how the heart lives . . . or dies. Each has the potential to injure as does hypertension and dyslipidemia. Yet addressing these subtle aspects of care may have as much power to protect

and heal the heart as do many medical treatments.

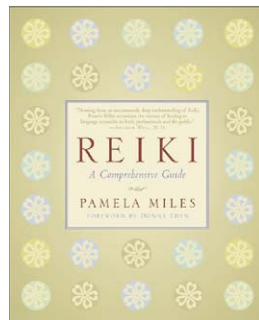
Dr. Guarneri masterfully shares stories from her practice where technology alone was insufficient to heal a broken heart. Forgiveness, optimism, and gratitude are salves to a damaged heart. Relaxation, therapeutic touch, and prayer create synergies with fish oil and other heart healthy supplements, exercise, and diet that truly define integrative cardiology.

She closes with an emphasis on the art of healing through listening, caring, and connection. These are clearly intrinsic to her own caring heart and practice throughout this collection of stories from her personal journals, and she has created an immensely powerful work.

Victor S. Sierpina, MD
University of Texas Medical Branch,
Galveston, TX

REFERENCE

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Reiki: A Comprehensive Guide

Pamela Miles. Introduction by
Donna Eden.
Jeremy P. Tarche/Penguin: New York, 2006

Numerous articles and books on the topic of reiki have been written in the past 25 years following the death of Mrs. Hawayo Takata, the Japanese woman who brought reiki to the West. Much of that body of knowledge has been clouded with misinformation; however, Pamela Miles does an excellent job of “honing in” on what is important in the practice of reiki, and she writes with authority based on the vastness of her professional training and experience.

After discovering reiki in 1986 during first trimester “pregnancy blahs,” Miles learned reiki and later commenced to bring reiki training and treatment into major New York City

hospitals. Thus, for the past 17 years she has taught reiki to patients and their families and to doctors, nurses, medical students, and other health professionals and people of all ages—from toddlers to a 93-year-old Holocaust survivor.

There has been a desperate need to develop an operational definition of reiki that has been vaguely defined as “universal life force energy,” chi, prana, energy medicine, or biofield therapy, which Miles claims is imprecise. She clarifies that reiki affects the *subtlest* level of the biofield, which we call the subtle vibrational body—the blueprint for outer, measurable reality. Unlike energy therapies, reiki requires no effort or concentration and is accessed through—but not directed by—the practitioner, she explains. Once accessed, reiki flows as water to seek its own level—much like a sponge soaking up what it can contain—which encourages balance in the biofield. Miles coined the term “primordial consciousness” to define reiki, emphasizing that reiki is closer to a state that can be achieved through meditation rather than any techniques of energy medicine.

Although subtle energy fields cannot be measured as magnetic or electrical fields can be measured, Miles is among those pioneers who are helping to redefine reiki as a scientifically validated healing modality that is being well integrated with conventional medicine—a goal that founder Dr. Mikao Usui supported. Miles further expands her definition of reiki as “a spiritual healing practice that can help return us to balanced functioning on every level—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, even social—regardless of our age or state of health.”

It is impressive that Miles began the practice of reiki with years of training in meditation and, thus, notes the important relationship and similarity between meditation and reiki. Bringing reiki from the East to the West—with its Eastern principles—is often challenging for the Westerner to adopt as a way of life:

*Just for today, do not anger.
Just for today, do not worry.
Honor your parents, teachers, and elders.
Do your work honestly.
Be kind to every living thing.*

These principles are integrated with the practice of reiki as Dr. Usui instructed: Recite the ideals aloud every morning and night in gassho meditation (hands together at the heart). Perhaps these precepts are related to Miles’s observation that reiki opens an inner

spiritual connection that can significantly change the way a person experiences life.

According to Miles, research findings demonstrate that the use of reiki is associated with decreased levels of stress hormones, improvement in immune indicators, improved blood pressure, subjective improvements in anxiety and pain, decreased heart rate, improved muscular function, improvement in mood and functioning of depressed patients, and overall enhanced well-being and increased vitality. Many of those who benefit from reiki the most are those who are most difficult to treat—those with fibromyalgia, AIDS, and victims of heart attacks. Furthermore, reiki can be delivered in the most stressful settings—the cardiac care unit, the delivery room, the operating room, the intensive care units, and the emergency rooms. Miles also cites examples of promising reiki research studies that include biological indications of relaxation and immune strength; improved management of cancer pain; and reduced pain, anxiety, and depression. What is most striking, however, are anecdotal observations from physicians that patients who receive reiki often recover

three times faster than the norm and often experience a reduced need for medication or total elimination of the need for medication. A consistent theme about reiki is that there are no iatrogenic effects. Reiki can do no harm. It can only help.

Miles advocates the need for adequate reiki training, practice, and experience—a standard that has not been clearly delineated in the West. “Instant mastery” is, indeed, a contradiction. The art of reiki is learned from the practice of reiki, and that learning cannot be acquired overnight; thus, to become a reiki master in a few days or even a few months does not give one the foundation that offers a wealth of experience to students. Miles provides excellent guidelines for choosing a reiki practitioner and/or reiki Master Teacher for treatment and mentoring. However, she mentions that the Reiki Alliance is an organization committed to Takata’s legacy and fails to mention that there are other independent reiki practitioners and organizations that are just as committed to Takata’s legacy, such as the International Association of Reiki Professionals (IARP). Although she, herself, paid a fee of

\$10,000 for Reiki Mastership as a standard held by the Alliance, reiki master teachers who do not belong to the Alliance do not adhere to that fee structure. What is more important is that the reiki practitioner feels that reiki is of worth and places value on obtaining Mastership.

In conclusion, Pamela Miles’s book *Reiki: A Comprehensive Guide* offers much to those who share her vision in seeing reiki emerge as a “cutting edge,” viable healing modality in the field of conventional medicine, complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), integrative medicine, traditional medicine, and collaborative medicine. Miles is clear in her mission that “We can be true to reiki as a spiritual healing practice and help it become available to the mainstream public.” For those who do not yet share that vision, *Reiki: A Comprehensive Guide* is nothing short of enlightening.

Carol A. Wilson, PhD, CHES, RMT
Salt Lake City, UT