

Wholistic Practices: How Do We Know This “Works”?

Science has thus far done poorly at “proving” the effectiveness of alternative, nontraditional, and integrative health treatments. But science failed to “prove” the validity of general relativity for decades, too. It is possible that the scientific criterion of “replication,” the requirement that any phenomenon must be repeatable on demand to be accepted as established, is far more difficult to achieve in the domains in which “mind” and “consciousness” may play a part. We contend that, with alternative health practices, there is ample justification for continuing working to answer the one simple question: Are People Better Off?

In the current context, this question becomes: “When people with intellectual and developmental disabilities get involved in a ‘menu’ of Wholistic Practices, are they better off than they would have been without it?”

This is a question that is easy to ask, and quite possible to approach with scientific methods. We are now engaged in a “Before and After” study of the people who just recently began participating in the Networks Wholistic Practices initiatives in two counties of Pennsylvania. About 10 people will be included in the “Before and After” investigation. These are people in the two counties who have a history of significant challenges to their own peace and comfort, as well as to those around them. The research design is called “Pre and Post with Comparison Groups.” We will use a simple one page instrument to ask people and their closest allies about their well-being from many angles, when their treatment begins, at the end of five sessions, and possibly again two months later.

The “menu” offered in the Networks initiatives is comprised of choices among several alternatives. The list, which is constantly being expanded, along with some common Internet definitions are:

Acupressure, Shiatsu	A form of therapy of Japanese origin based on the same principles as acupuncture, in which pressure is applied to certain points on the body using the hands.
Aromatherapy	Massage of the body and especially of the face with a preparation of fragrant essential oils extracted from herbs, flowers, and fruits; broadly : the use of aroma to enhance a feeling of well-being
Cranio Sacral Therapy	A system of alternative medicine intended to relieve pain and tension by gentle manipulations of the skull regarded as harmonizing with a natural rhythm in the central nervous system.
Reflexology	A system of massage used to relieve tension and treat illness, based on the theory that there are reflex points on the feet, hands, and head linked to every part of the body.
Reiki	<i>rākē/ noun</i> A healing technique based on the principle that the therapist can channel energy into the patient by means of touch, to activate the natural healing processes of the patient's body and restore physical and emotional well-being.
Others	Massage, Meditation Training & Assistance, Breathing Exercises

We are also collecting data about individual quality of life for about 15 people who are not taking part in the Wholistic initiative. This will provide a Comparison Group, an important facet of strong research design. If the treatment is effective, people who are participating will show positive outcomes, while the people not participating will not.

We are adding another small group of about 12 people to the “Before and After” studies, a group that has not previously been included in research – people who have a history of trauma, including sexual. In this group, 7 have chosen to participate, and 5 have declined, at least for now. This provides us with a Comparison Group, an important facet of strong research design. We believe including people with trauma histories is important because it is known that a very high proportion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have experienced trauma. Some people with that history may have complex reactions to touch, and this will complicate the treatment process. It will be of great interest to begin to find out whether the pain and wounding from past traumas can be addressed and ameliorated in any measurable ways by Wholistic Practices.

In addition to the potential benefits of the treatments themselves, via energy and other channels thus far poorly understood by Western medicine, it is important to mention the very high importance of touch itself. We have in a sense created a “desert” of touch in the residential human services system, in that touch by staff is a topic fraught with fear, risk, and liability. There are people living in community settings who are simply never touched at all – not even in safe and healthy ways. How this affects human beings, so wired to need touch as in the “grooming” behavior of primates (that takes up about 20% of waking hours in other species) is a topic that is generally ignored in our consideration of quality of life. It may be particularly crucial for people “in the system” whose use of verbal language is limited or absent.

Wholistic Practices Inventory: HOW DO YOU FEEL?

(To Be Answered by the Person and/or Whoever Knows the Person Best)

SEQUENCE:

First ask the first item about **THEN**, before beginning Wholistic Practices or Body Work. Next, immediately ask about **NOW**. Example of wording: “About the reason you came to Wholistic Practices, how were you doing before you came, bad or good? OK, and how about now, bad or good?” Be flexible in wording. Adapt to the person.

METHOD:

Each quality item is approached as two “Either-Or” questions. For example, Either-Or question on the first item is “How do you feel about being calm, good or bad?” Once the person answers, for example, “good,” the follow-up is a second Either-Or question: “Would you say good or very good?” (“In between” is implied, if the person says “neither” or “OK” or “neither” or any similar response. But answers like that have to be checked by probing with “Oh, so it’s in between, not really good or bad?”)

1	2	3	4	5	<i>Blank</i>
Very Bad	Bad	In Between	Good	Very Good	<i>Leave blank if no answer</i>
					?

	Life Quality Area	THEN (Before the First Session)	NOW
1	The thing(s) that led you to Wholistic Practices or Body Work	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2	Feeling calm	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
3	Feeling happy	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
4	Feeling in control	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
5	Feeling confident	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
6	Feeling safe	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
7	Feelings about friends, family, co-workers, neighbors	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
8	Feelings about people you live with	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
9	Feelings about people you work with	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
10	Health	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
11	Moving around	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
12	Pain	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
13	Sleep	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
14	Socializing	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
15	Life in general	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

How many of these 15 questions were answered *by you*, even if with assistance or interpretation? _____