



# Healthcare Reform Begins with Caring for Ourselves

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*“The human mind treats a new idea the same way the body treats a strange protein; it rejects it.”*

—Peter Medawar, Brazilian-British biologist

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (PPACA) mandates that medical insurance contracts provide preventive care without charging co-payments. The date for national compliance with PPACA is 2014. This mandate encourages employees and their families to identify and address health concerns prior to the onset of chronic diseases or conditions (Winter, 2012). At the same time, it widens the definition of health care and the responsibility of medical care providers.

This transformation of care also includes a payment shift from volumes to value, in which value is defined as quality divided by cost (Lawson, 2012). The preventive care mandate expands the need for training in areas like lifestyle education and self-regulation skills. Such training minimizes the health-damaging

effects of stress for both patient and practitioner. The formation of accountable care organizations across a continuum of care, combined with a restructuring of reimbursement criteria (defining the way in which providers receive compensation for care delivery), contributes to an environment of significant change.

People often react to change in the same way they react to a perceived threat or danger. This “stress response” creates chemical and physiological reactions that impair health (Benson, 1975). Resources are diverted away from rejuvenating functions like rest and repair in order to fuel reactions to the changing environment. In an ironic twist, the PPACA-mandated changes for preventive care coverage also have the potential to increase stress for patients and caregivers alike. As a result, stress

reduction interventions are increasingly needed to maintain optimal health and safe job performance during periods of change and transformation.

Many complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapies that reduce stress by balancing the biofields are being integrated into hospitals and clinics. Effective and consistent health care depends on energetically resilient people. Our entire healthcare system is managed by people. Our organizations consist of people. Even the most advanced surgical robots and genomic pharmaceuticals are produced and guided by—you guessed it—people. Each human body is surrounded by energetic biofields. People’s biofields impact each other during personal interactions, and physical health corresponds with the cohesiveness of each biofield. Healthy

# Cost reduction, safety and quality enhancement are inseparable from healthy lifestyles.

biofields resist infection and accelerate healing. Our emotional lives also affect our health and well-being—including relationships with parents, spouses, children, siblings and neighbors. These people impact our biofields before we even arrive at the workplace where we encounter even more people: co-workers, mentors and mentees, people serving us, and the patients we serve. Calm, centered caregivers operating with coherent biofields around their energetically balanced bodies share these qualities with their patients (Gerber, 2000).

If we feel overwhelmed, anxious or worried as we start our workdays, that stress dictates whether the central nervous system activates sympathetic (stress) or parasympathetic (relaxation) responses. Fundamental to healthy biological processes is the balance between stress and relaxation. Either you are pumping out stress hormones or you are producing signals and neurochemicals supportive of flexibility, stamina, growth and repair.

Self-care and energy medicine address multiple aspects of healthcare reform, reducing costs of care, and improving the quality of outcomes by decreasing chronic stress. Mental focus and recall improve as stress responses decrease, allowing the practitioner to focus on the patient and provide person-centered care. These enhanced patient interactions reduce errors. With healthier outcomes, revenues increase. High quality healing happens with daily awareness of and attention to stress reduction and the promotion of coherent energy. Holistic nurses recognize and reinforce this concept of quality healing in Core Value 5 of the *Holistic Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice* (AHNA & ANA, 2007) (See sidebar at right).

Self-care and stress management begin with people (and environments) that are energetically balanced. As healthcare organizations adapt to PPACA's prevention and wellness oriented mandates, implementing simple energetic techniques, such as Healing Touch, can jump-start success (See sidebar on p. 10).

I recently heard a hospital system CFO discussing healthcare reform. He emphasized *the ability to tolerate ambiguity* as imperative for success (Lawson, 2012). Ambiguity encompasses the unknown, unfamiliar and unformed aspects of change. As previously stated, a person's initial reaction to change (and ambiguity) often triggers a stressful response. This stress response causes blood to drain from the brain and flow to the major muscles so that we can fight or flee. Such a reaction can be useful in an environment where the perceived threat is an isolated event requiring a focused burst of physical power more than mental prowess. In our healthcare settings, where quality and safety depend on critical thinking skills and clear decision-making, stress related to reform and evolving practices tends to be omnipresent and not neatly addressed as a specific incident. The need for self-care and ongoing stress regulation skills for caregivers becomes integral to the high performance necessary to achieve the ultimate goals of reform: to transform the quality, costs and delivery of health care (Amoils, 2011).

Healthcare reform begins with caring for ourselves. The practice of consistent self-care by caregivers directly affects the consistency of the patient-centered care they provide. Cost reduction, safety and quality enhancement are inseparable from healthy lifestyles.

Holistic nurses who practice energy-based therapies participate in a holistic approach to healthcare reform that benefits both the caregiver and the patient. According to the *Holistic Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice*, it is the role of the holistic nurse to "create healing environments for themselves by attending to their own well being, letting go of self-destructive behaviors and attitudes, and practicing stress reduction and centering techniques. By doing this, holistic nurses serve as role models to others, be they clients, colleagues or personal contacts" (AHNA & ANA, 2007, p.17).

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## Core Value 5: Holistic Nurse Self-Care

Self-care as well as personal awareness of and continuous focus on being an instrument of healing are significant requirements for holistic nurses. Holistic nurses value themselves and mobilize the necessary resources to care for themselves. They endeavor to integrate self-awareness, self-care, and self-healing into their lives by incorporating practices such as self-assessment, meditation, yoga, good nutrition, energy therapies, movement, art, support and lifelong learning.

### Healing Touch Program's Chakra Connection for Self-Care

Healing Touch is a gentle, non-invasive energy medicine program created by Janet Mentgen, RN. The AHNA honored Janet as the holistic nurse of the year in 1988. The Chakra Connection is a harmonizing and balancing technique, which can be incorporated into your self-care practice. It can also be used to promote calm and mental clarity during stressful situations or times of decision making. A one-page sheet that outlines this technique can be downloaded at: [www.healingtouchprogram.com/content\\_assets/selfcare/articles/Self-CC\\_handout1.pdf](http://www.healingtouchprogram.com/content_assets/selfcare/articles/Self-CC_handout1.pdf)

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**Bethlyn Gerard** B.B.A., CPA, LMT, HTCP integrates biofield sciences and lifestyle therapies into health care. She currently works as a Healing Touch Certified Practitioner at the Living Well Dallas Center helping physicians and their patients. By blending process improvement strategies with biofeedback and therapeutic skills such as Healing Touch, Bethlyn helps clients alleviate the damaging effects of energetic imbalances and chronic stress. A licensed CPA, her post graduate career began as an auditor for Ernst and Whinney. In addition to auditing hospitals, she served the Daughters of Charity as a process improvement consultant in their Seton Hospital System. In 2006, with private equity, she founded a research center. After studying over 70 different neuro/biofeedback techniques and technologies, Bethlyn validated the cost-effectiveness of energy-based therapies. She chose to pursue certification through the Healing Touch Program because of their HTPA professional association, endorsement from AHNA, and credentialing through ANCC. Bethlyn continues to assist individuals and organizations eager to integrate energy medicine into self-care and service-line operations. Bethlyn can be contacted at [www.5starhealing.com](http://www.5starhealing.com) or by calling the Living Well Dallas Center: (972) 930-0260.



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