

EFT in the News

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Unorthodox therapy gains local following

By Rick Rogers
STAFF WRITER

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VISTA – A once-dismissed therapy for mental disorders is gaining a following among San Diego medical experts who treat combat veterans.

Social workers, chaplains and psychiatrists from Naval Medical Center San Diego and Camp Pendleton are learning the Emotional Freedom Technique, an unorthodox method that even its creator can't explain precisely.

It and a treatment that uses virtual reality are two of the enterprising approaches being tried at the medical center to alleviate combat-induced psychological wounds.

The Emotional Freedom Technique was developed by Stanford engineer Gary Craig in the 1990s. It was largely ignored by the mental health establishment because no one had conducted a study on its effectiveness.

But Jeannie Ertl, a senior clinical social worker at the medical center, gave the technique a chance in November.

She and many of her patients are happy that she did.

"EFT is tremendous for treating anxiety associated with post traumatic stress disorder," Ertl said.

She has tried the method on 15 patients, 12 of whom found it helpful at relieving or eliminating symptoms such as anxiety and stress. Ertl uses the technique, which hasn't been approved by the Defense Department, in conjunction with more traditional therapies.

"It seems to work for a lot of people," she said.

Seaman Wilbur Hurley is one of them.

Hurley, a 20-year-old corpsman, returned to Camp Pendleton in October plagued with horrible visions. In mid-September, he had witnessed a young Marine kill himself while serving in Iraq. It was just weeks before Hurley returned to his base at Camp Pendleton.

"I don't care what happened in Iraq," Hurley promised himself. "What happened there would stay there."

But back home in Calvert County, Md., Hurley couldn't erase the image of the dead Marine.



LAURA EMBRY / Union-Tribune
Susan Hannibal, a self-described intuitive healer from Vista, demonstrated the Emotional Freedom Technique used to treat stress.



CRISSEY PASCUAL / Union-Tribune
Seaman Wilbur Hurley, a 20-year-old corpsman, returned from Camp Pendleton from Iraq in October plagued with horrible visions. He has since been treated for post-traumatic stress disorder using the Emotional Freedom Technique, which is based on the same theory as acupuncture.



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"I felt like a black cloud was over my head every day," Hurley said. "I had vivid dreams of walking through fields of gore. I isolated myself from friends and family."

By early December, anxiety attacks sometimes made Hurley pull to the side of the road until his tremors passed.

Willing to try something new, Hurley followed a friend's advice and went to Susan Hannibal, a self-described intuitive healer from Vista who uses the Emotional Freedom Technique to treat stress, anxiety and post traumatic stress disorder. It was Hannibal who taught the technique to Ertl and several military chaplains.



Hannibal explained to Hurley how the method is based on the same theory as acupuncture – that the body is an energy field with points that can be manipulated to restore health.

Patients focus on a traumatizing event while repeating a self-affirming chant and tapping parts of their body, such as their hands, lips and sides. A typical session is about 90 minutes, and some results can be seen after a single session.

"Once I started doing the tapping, an overwhelming calm came over me," Hurley said. "I had no cares or worries in the world. In fact I left Sue's (office) singing. It was pretty much the greatest day of my life."

Hurley spent that weekend trying to summon bad feelings just to prove that he could stay calm. He concentrated on the worst cases he'd seen while patching up Marines for seven months in Ramadi. He also thought about the suicidal Marine.

"But I felt nothing. It wasn't there anymore," Hurley said.

More than a month later, Hurley said he believes that what happened in Iraq is finally staying there.

"Nothing that happened over there ruins my day now," he said.

For more information about the Emotional Freedom Technique, visit www.emofree.com or www.guidedhealing.com.

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Important note: While EFT has produced remarkable clinical results, it must still be considered to be in the experimental stage and thus practitioners and the public must take complete responsibility for their use of it. Further, Gary Craig is not a licensed health professional and offers EFT as an ordained minister and as a personal performance coach. Those who want to discuss the use of EFT for a specific emotional or physical problem with a professional in the health field are referred to our Referral section, where a number of licensed and unlicensed practitioners who use EFT in their practices are listed. Where appropriate, qualified physicians should be consulted.