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## Impact of Empathetic Touch Therapy on Reducing Feelings of Stress, Anxiety, Pain and Depression

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### Abstract:

**Introduction:**The association between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and cardiovascular disease has been established. Complementary and integrative medicine (CAM) modalities are commonly underutilized due to their mixed results and need further evaluation. Empathetic Touch therapy is a holistic healing tool, which incorporates integrative medicine techniques such as energy healing, acupressure, craniosacral therapy, shamanic healing, aspects of Chinese medicine and spiritual care to promote wholeness in the body, mind, and spirit. The purpose of this study is to analyze symptoms of stress, anxiety, pain, and depression in a primarily veterans affairs population suffering from PTSD and voluntarily undergoing Empathetic Touch therapy sessions at a non-profit organization called the Forgotten Soldier Program. **Hypothesis:**We assessed the hypothesis that Empathetic Touch therapy will reduce feelings of anxiety, stress, pain, and depression. **Methods:**This is a retrospective analysis of 424 participants from the Forgotten Soldier Program who completed surveys before and after an approximately 1-hour session of Empathetic Touch therapy (November 7, 2013 through August 11, 2017). Self-reported scores on a scale of 0 to 10 for feelings of stress, anxiety, pain, and depression were collected before and after every therapy session. The change from baseline was determined and analyzed using a paired t-test. **Results:**Across a cohort of 424 individual patients, a total of 1,359 individual sessions were included for analysis. Self-reported feelings of stress (n=1267), anxiety (n=1223), pain (n=1275), and depression (n=416) were reduced by  $3.27\pm 3.34$ ,  $2.98\pm 3.53$ ,  $2.44\pm 3.66$  and  $1.46\pm 3.7$  (all p-values <0.001), respectively. No significant adverse events related to Empathetic Touch therapy were reported. **Conclusion:**Empathetic Touch therapy significantly reduces feelings of stress, anxiety, pain, and depression. Alternative and integrative modalities need to be further incorporated in a holistic treatment of patients. Assessing the impact of Empathetic Touch therapy on cardiovascular endpoints is warranted.

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### Author Disclosure Information:

**D. Arz:** F. Ownership Interest; Significant; Owner. **M. McClain:** None. **K. Quach:** None. **J. Sky:** None. **D. Steinhorn:** None. **S.A. Shah:** None.

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