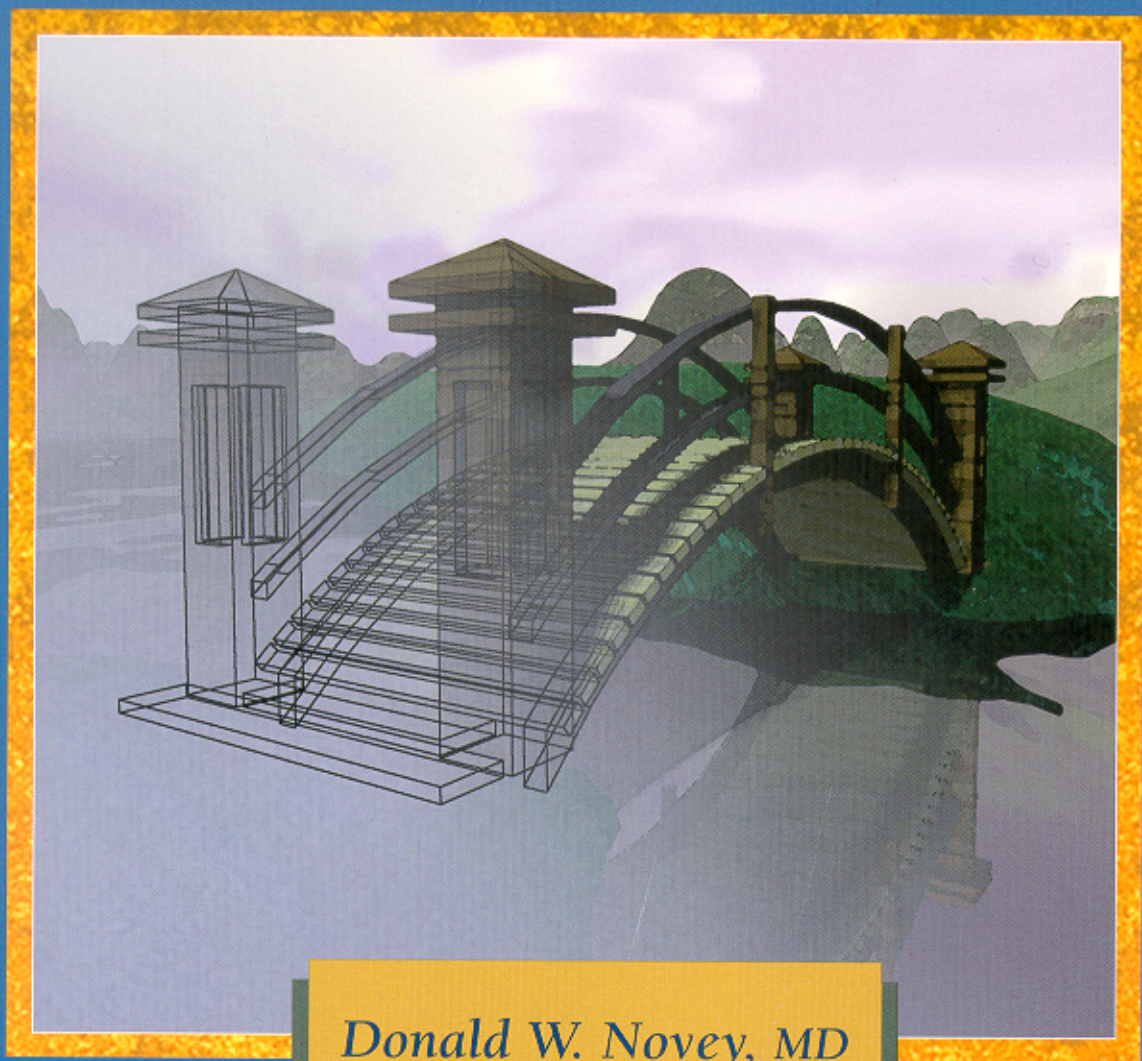
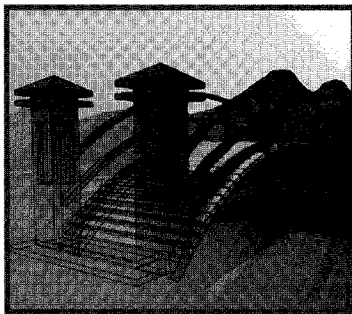


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Polarity Therapy

LESLIE KORN

Origins and History

Randolph Stone (1890-1981) originally conceived of Polarity Therapy, a philosophy and method of health care, education, and healing based on electromagnetic and subtle energy fields and their flow or disruption in the human or animal body. Stone's work reflected a lifetime of scholarship and clinical practice that was infused with a deep respect for the practice of spiritual awareness and service to others. He received his degrees in osteopathy, chiropractic, naturopathy, naprapathy, and neuropathy. In 1914 he was granted an OP (Other Practitioner) license by the state Board of Examiners in Chicago, granting him the right to practice all methods of drugless healing without surgery.

Trained in the manipulative therapies of early twentieth century European-American medicine, Stone believed there was a missing link underlying the cause and effect of health and illness. His annual visits to India (where he made his home later in life) provided him an opportunity to practice medicine among the poor as well as people referred to as "incurable." Ayurvedic medical principles, with their emphasis on energy centers or *nadis*, influenced his practice, as did acupuncture. These healing traditions led Stone to synthesize Western and Eastern "drugless" healing practices, which he called Polarity Therapy. Unlike acupuncture, which used needles to stimulate the life force, he believed that the artful application of hands, with consciousness and intention behind them, could create even more beneficial effects. He thus transformed the mechanical approaches to the manipulative therapies by advancing the following thesis: if the energy blockage(s) underlying disease could be released, structure and function would find their own level and return the individual to balance and optimal health.

Mechanism of Action According to Its Own Theory

Polarity Therapy is the science and art of healing that brings balance to the human energy field by hands-on manipulation of bone, soft tissue, and energy points; vegetarian, nutritional, and attitudinal counseling; and specific stretching exercises using sound and movement called *Polarity Yoga*.

Polarity Therapy addresses the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of the individual, suggesting that energy blockages in one field are reflected in all fields. The goal of Polarity is to trace (by palpation) and release (by skilled touch) those energy blockages that manifest as pain. To do this, the practitioner applies three depths of touch depending on whether the energy blockage reflects a hyperactive, hypoactive, or neutral state of activity. These include a very light touch (off the body or gentle hands-on), a medium touch (meeting tissue resistance), and deep pressure used to break up crystalline deposits and scar tissue. A major emphasis is placed on understanding how poor nutritional habits and poor digestion lead to energy blockages that manifest as pain, gas, and discomfort. Pressure on energy points, rocking, bone manipulation, stretching, and rotation of joints are some of the methods used to help the patient achieve deep relaxation, improve digestive function, gain greater self-awareness of behavioral and cognitive impacts on health, and take an increasingly responsible role in creating a healthier lifestyle. Because Polarity Therapy has its roots in both chiropractic and cranial osteopathy, a major principle is to make structural adjustments or manipulations only *after* the energy underlying the structural balance is addressed.

The theory of Polarity Therapy suggests that all forms and processes arise from a universal source of life energy and, like the function of the atom, all life energies revolve around a neutral core, reflecting attraction and repulsion as well as positive and negative action and reactions. The physical and subtle energies of the body and mind are comprised of both functional and structural relationships that can be assessed, interpreted, and responded to therapeutically based on these principles of attraction and repulsion.

In clinical practice, this attraction and repulsion is manifested in obvious ways such as physical compensatory strategies found in the geometric structures of the spine, or more subtle symptoms such as inhibition of respiratory processes and restriction of diaphragmatic function following emotional trauma. It is the practitioner's responsibility to "trace" these imbalances through thorough assessment and evaluation, a refined proprioceptive sense of palpation and therapeutic touch, history-taking, and communication to develop a plan for managing the helping and healing process.

The practitioner assesses imbalances and helps the patient achieve a state of balance through artful and specific strategies whereby the innate wisdom and restorative capacities of the whole being can bring about improved health and well-being. Imbalances in one area (physical function) are reflected in imbalances in other reciprocal areas (reflexes). Reflexes may be functional, structural, mental, or emotional. These reflexes may be acute or latent, consciously known, or unknown to the patient.

Neck pain, for example, would be assessed as it relates to structural stressors, such as genetics, posture, occupational ergonomics, or acute changes resulting from an accident, as well as for chronic restrictions that may result from poor digestion and fecal elimination. Generally, the interrelationships among several variables are evaluated. This theory of Polarity suggests that by releasing energy blockages, whether they are manifested as physical pain, restricted range of motion, mental negativity, or autonomic hyperarousal, deep relaxation is affected. Energy is also balanced and flows throughout constricted or flaccid areas; as a result, the patient feels better kinesthetically, release fears, or reframes negative belief systems, and the whole organism moves toward its potential.

The theory of Polarity Therapy emphasizes the importance of the practitioner's role in modeling a healthy lifestyle. A vital part of the theory of Polarity involves engaging patients to act positively on their own behalf and to assume a vital role in healing. The theory and practice of intention also plays a strong role, and many practitioners develop a non-denominational meditation practice to focus the power of intention for healing and bioenergies. The role of love and compassion, or unconditional positive regard, coupled with the role of positive intention, facilitates the work of the practitioner with the patient.

Biologic Mechanism of Action

Polarity Therapy is a unique bridge between the purely energetic-based methods, such as Reiki and acupuncture, and the physical-based methods such as massage, chiropractic, and osteopathy. Because Polarity Therapy integrates energy methods with physical manipulation of soft tissue and postural alignment of bony structures (with the addition of lifestyle counseling), practitioners draw from many disciplines to link research with clinically observed patient responses.

Psychobiologic responses based on research in massage and acupuncture and clinical observations of response to Polarity Therapy suggest increased levels of endogenous endorphins and the neurotransmitter serotonin result.

Psychophysiologic responses are observed as autonomic alterations in states of consciousness, such as deep relaxation associated with brain hemispheric synchrony and parasympathetic dominance. Anecdotal reports of hypnagogic imagery associated with theta states and increased creativity are common. Krieger¹ has reported increased levels of anomalous cognition resulting from the practice of therapeutic touch, and this has been observed among practitioners. It may result from the effects of increased blood flow into the right hemisphere in response to meditation. Korn has postulated that Polarity Therapy is a form of meditative touch.²

Psychologic effects have been observed or reported in Polarity Therapy patients.^{2,3} These effects have a potential to decondition cognitive belief systems and affective states. Polarity Therapy facilitates sensory-motor biofeedback and awareness. The Polarity session also facilitates states of consciousness associated with alpha and theta wave states and serves as a deconditioning strategy for state-dependent memories held in body tissues.³

Polarity Therapy helps to define and improve body image by enhancing kinesthetic and proprioceptive recognition of boundaries. This feature is useful when working with people with body image-related disorders such as bulimia, anorexia, alexythymia, and changes arising from loss of limb or chronic illness.

Polarity Therapy helps regulate complex neurobiologic rhythms within the body and between people, and it facilitates the capacity for attachment among healthy individuals and people suffering from attachment-related disorders. Axt⁴ has published her clinical research on the application of Polarity Therapy for the treatment of autism and of children with special developmental needs. To date, the only controlled experimental research directly using the modality of Polarity Therapy involved pilot studies at The Ohio State Medical School.⁵

Scientific research in bioelectromagnetics and bioenergy fields has proliferated significantly in the past 20 years (Becker,⁶ Green,⁷ Adey,⁸ and Oschman⁹). This research provides the foundation for understanding the effects of electromagnetic and subtle energy fields on human function. This research provides theoretic and conceptual links for research in the fields of Polarity and related touch therapy fields.

Demographics

Approximately 1200 practitioners are members of the American Polarity Therapy Association (many others practice professionally but are unregistered) located throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Europe. Some individuals primarily practice Polarity Therapy while other clinicians, such as chiropractors, massage therapists, psychologists, and somatic educators, are dual-trained and incorporate Polarity Therapy as an adjunctive part of their profession. Patients are drawn from a broad spectrum of individuals seeking to improve their health or recover from acute and chronic illnesses.

Women seek treatments from Polarity therapists in greater numbers than men. This reflects a woman's general tendency to seek alternative forms of healing more often¹⁰ and because women are more likely to seek touch therapies.

People of all ages receive Polarity Therapy. Individuals from middle class and European-American backgrounds use Polarity Therapy most frequently. Increasingly, though, practitioners in other countries (Poland, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Mexico), as well as the inner cities and rural areas of the US, are reaching out in public health settings to bring Polarity Therapy to more diverse groups of people.

Forms of Therapy

Criteria for the practice of Polarity Therapy (615 hours of training) are outlined in the Standards for Practice. These standards form the core foundation for practice that is expanded upon by individual practitioners, who may emphasize their own methods and idiosyncratic approaches to practice.

Some practitioners emphasize exploring nutritional changes, such as a vegetarian diet, while others emphasize bodywork more. Others may integrate the use of tuning forks (music energetics) and craniosacral therapies. Following the 615-hour training, which includes clinical practice sessions and supervision, the practitioner is proficient in Polarity Therapy and is able to develop and implement an appropriate plan for the patient. Registration as a Polarity practitioner requires competency in the main areas of bodywork, evaluation, nutrition, exercise, and communication.

The practice of Polarity Therapy has always included practitioners from other modalities. In recent years, practitioners have expanded their practices with additional or advanced training in other modalities or have specialized within their practices. These methods include craniosacral therapies, music or sound energetics, Polarity Yoga, and posttrauma therapy.

Indications and Reasons for Referral

Individuals seek Polarity practitioners for a variety of reasons at different stages in their lives or during the course of their illness. Chronic or acute pain, stress, a lack of success with conventional therapies, referral from a friend or relative who has been helped, curiosity, or not wanting to use drugs or see a physician are some reasons people seek a Polarity practitioner. Individuals may have been referred by another practitioner for adjunctive work (for example, a psychotherapist for trauma resolution, a surgeon for preoperative relaxation or postoperative healing) or to assist in reduction of pain medications or drug and alcohol detoxification.

There are numerous health conditions and disorders that result in patient referrals to Polarity Therapists. Main conditions for referral include the following:

- Somatization disorders
- Chronic and acute pain
- Temporomandibular joint pain
- Depression
- Chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia
- Stress-related disorders, including organic dysfunction related to autonomic hyperarousal
- Psychologic distress, such as anxiety
- General feelings of malaise

Polarity Therapy has also been used for postsurgical recovery; to increase lymphatic (edema) and circulatory flow; and to treat sinusitis, asthma and allergies, osteoarthritis, and rheumatoid arthritis. Polarity Therapy has been used widely during early, middle, and later stages of pregnancy; during delivery; and for postpartum care of mothers and infants. Digestive complaints, including irritable bowel, Crohn's disease, constipation, and poor peristalsis in adults and older adults are common reasons for referral. Specialized treatments that are not often found in other modalities include prostate drain and perineal treatment to release tissue congestion in the prostate and to release spasm or chronic contraction in the perineal area and anal sphincter. Polarity Therapy also is used by practitioners trained in appropriate methods of touch for resolution of traumatic stress, associated phobias, and traumatic memories.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that—as with many complementary therapies—people often seek help through Polarity Therapy as a “last resort.” Those seeking treatment include individuals diagnosed with neurologic conditions such as multiple sclerosis, peripheral neuropathy, and sequelae of stroke. Children and adults with autism and attention deficit disorder¹¹ also receive treatment.

Individuals already using holistic approaches for recovery from various forms of cancer, heart disease, and diabetes also undertake treatment. For example, individuals may undertake treatment for breast cancer to improve energy flow as an adjunct to comprehensive nutritional and metabolic modalities, or to militate against the side effects of radiation or

chemotherapy. Polarity Therapy techniques may be used to aid the postsurgical wound healing process, decrease adhesion formation, and regain range of motion and reduce pain (as in the case of mastectomies).

Polarity Therapy has been applied in crosscultural settings for treatment of culture-bound syndromes such as *susto* (fright) and *mal de ojo* (evil eye). Because Polarity Therapy is rooted in touch, a nonverbal language that can be found in similar forms in most cultures, it can facilitate crosscultural communication.

Polarity Therapy also helps maintain well-being as well as fostering optimal health and performance among athletes.

Office Applications

The following is an alphabetic list of conditions that respond to Polarity Therapy. As with all alternative therapies, the use of Polarity Therapy does not preclude the use of mainstream medical therapies in addition.

Abortion-related trauma; acute pain; anxiety; asthma (including exercise-induced asthma); autonomic hyperarousal; benign prostatic hyperplasia; carpal tunnel syndrome; chronic pain; colitis; constipation; decompression illness (postchamber); digestive disorders associated with autonomic hyperarousal; dysmenorrhea; edema associated with pregnancy and premenstrual condition; fatigue; fibromyalgia; hypoxia due to shallow breathing; muscle tension including respiratory diaphragm constriction; nerve impingement disorders; premenstrual pain; sacroiliac joint pain; sinusitis; situational depression; soft tissue pain; temporomandibular joint dysfunction; tension headaches; thoracic outlet and tinnitus; torticollis; traumatic stress; and whiplash.

Practical Applications

Licensed clinicians may undertake study at the associate level or registered level to integrate methods into their practice. Otherwise, they can refer to a Polarity Therapy practitioner.

Licensed health care clinicians typically refer patients to a Polarity Therapy practitioner to integrate a *bodyworker* into the team of providers already working on behalf of the patient. This also may take place in the growing number of group “integrative” medicine practices.

Polarity is ideal for patients with stress-related disorders. Enhancing self-regulation capacities significantly relieves both affectively and psychophysiologically stress-related disorders. The ability to relax deeply and develop awareness about how cognition and behavior contributes to illness is an important part of a lifestyle change and home self-care program.

Polarity Therapy is beneficial for patients suffering from chronic pain and the despair

it may bring. Polarity Therapy has the capacity to provide a respite from pain and restore simple bodily pleasures. In addition, it activates and renews patients' hopes that their body is not merely a source of suffering. Chronic pain is a complex syndrome requiring a comprehensive approach. Polarity Therapy provides a structured approach to gaining awareness into proprioceptive sensations and increased self-regulation of mental and physical functions. Increased levels of endorphins and serotonin, improved circulation and lymphatic drainage, and an enhanced sense of pleasure and well-being all promote the healing process.

Research Base

Risk and Safety

No authoritative studies have been done on the risks and safety issues associated with Polarity Therapy. However, based on information gleaned from insurance or malpractice claims, no claims have been made against practitioners. Some claims have been filed and settled with regard to ethical misconduct. These involved practitioners who were dually trained and licensed in another specialty. There is an active ethics board that reviews and responds to complaints. By all accounts, Polarity Therapy is a very safe, gentle technique.

Efficacy

Benefit probabilities vary according to the goals and objectives that are set by patients and practitioners. Polarity practitioners do not diagnose or label themselves "healers." They believe that by restoring balance to the energy fields, the body and mind can help individuals regain their health and their well-being. A distinction is made between *healing* and *cure*. Polarity Therapy can and does bring about "healing," but it may not cure. At a basic level, Polarity Therapy can help almost everyone achieve a state of deep relaxation and (at least temporary) peace of mind. Because Polarity Therapy is as much a philosophy of balanced living as it is a therapeutic intervention, there is a wide variation in effects.

From a long-term standpoint, Polarity Therapy is very effective for many people and conditions. The positive effects are cumulative when applied correctly. Many practitioners would agree that changing disease processes rooted in poor lifestyle habits takes time, strong patient motivation, compliance, and self-care at home between visits. In this regard, Polarity Therapy is as much an education process as a treatment program.

There are few people who cannot or do not benefit from regular skilled touch, exercise, improved nutrition, and mental attitudes. For example, health problems experienced by older adults (such as constipation, poor circulation, insomnia, loneliness, and depression) are especially responsive to the skilled, caring, and therapeutic touch of a compassionate practitioner. While the focus may be on stimulating peristaltic rhythm and ensuring adequate and correct nutrition and water intake, the synergetic effects of the whole experience are difficult to reduce into separate variables.

Anecdotal reports indicate a majority of patients received positive benefits that increase with time. When Polarity Therapy is viewed as a method that increases awareness and consciousness about the self and body-mind functions, logic suggests a range of positive benefits that increase in direct proportion to the increased levels of awareness. This is not to say that all benefits depend on either belief or long-term sessions alone. One, two, or more Polarity sessions have alleviated conditions such as chronic headaches, osteoarthritic pain, and lower back pain.

Druglike Information

The use of nutrition and herbs is a vital part of Polarity Therapy practice.

The herbal formula *polarity tea* is comprised of equal parts of fenugreek seed, fennel seed, licorice root, and double the amount of flax seed. Combine these seeds and roots, and simmer 1 teaspoon of the mixture in boiling water for approximately 15 minutes. Strain after boiling. Drink two cups daily.

The liver flush or the "Orange Randolph" also is part of the morning drink. This consists of 4 to 6 ounces of fresh squeezed citrus juice (orange or lemon) in a glass with 1 to 2 tablespoons of cold pressed virgin olive oil. Add one clove of fresh garlic or ginger. Mix in blender, then drink the liver flush in alternating sips with the hot polarity tea as a breakfast drink. Eat nothing else for 2 hours.

The following is a brief review of some of the herbs just mentioned:

Flax (Linum usitatissimum L) is rich in unsaturated fatty acids containing from 39% to 41% linoleic acid.¹² The seed is traditionally used throughout India and Mexico, either as a tea or soaked in water and allowed to swell as an aid to intestinal function.

Fennel (Foeniculum vulgare mill) contains essential oils and is used as a carminative.¹²

Licorice is used in Ayurveda (India) as a tonic demulcent, expectorant, diuretic, emmenagogue, and gentle laxative.¹³ People with hypertension or edema should not drink large quantities of licorice root tea.

Fenugreek is used traditionally to regulate blood sugar. Folk reports suggest efficacy for allergies.

Self-Help versus Professional

The practice of Polarity Therapy is divided into self-applied and professional practice. The practitioner's goal is to help the patient integrate lifestyle practices that include the philosophy and self-help exercises, nutrition, relaxation strategies, and pressure points in different body areas.

A professional practitioner is required for application of the complete program (tailored to each individual) and for administration of full bodywork sessions.

Visiting a Professional

A Polarity practitioner is a professional skilled in the art of touch and health education for therapeutic purposes. The practitioner will ask what the patient hopes to obtain from a session or a series of sessions; take a history; and use methods of touch, exercise, and nutritional and attitudinal counseling. Because Polarity involves a commitment to a healthy lifestyle, the practitioner will present options for improving health through behavioral changes. However, the practitioner should not be dogmatic when making these suggestions. The practitioner should gently assist patients in making the changes that feel right for them. A Polarity session generally involves lying on a treatment (massage) table with light cotton clothes (or without, as the patient prefers). The patient then receives an hour-long session with an experience of deep relaxation and varying pressures from light to moderate or deep. The session should not hurt, but it should be both stimulating and relaxing. During the session, the patient can talk or remain silent as desired, and the practitioner will help the patient to focus on breathing and learning how to relax and achieve a healthy balance of body and mind. Because Polarity also supports the role of spirituality in health and healing, the patient is welcome to talk about spiritual interests and to ask health-related questions. The results of Polarity Therapy sessions vary and may include profound relaxation, new insight into energetic patterns and their implications, and relief from numerous specific problematic situations.

Credentialing

The APTA maintains a registry of registered practitioners. There are no states that license Polarity Therapy by itself.

Training

The APTA oversees the development of standards for training at two levels and for continuing education. Currently, the first level of Associate Practitioner (155 required course hours) provides a basis for beginning to practice, with an additional 460 hours required for achieving the status of Registered Polarity Practitioner.

Training for students is available from both schools and individuals. A yearly conference is also available that provides seminars for practitioners and interested individuals. A list of registered schools and membership can be obtained from the APTA.

What to Look for in a Provider

Word of mouth often is the best form of referral in any therapy. Speaking with friends or colleagues about their experiences with particular practitioners is considered the best way to find a competent, artful, and caring practitioner. Patients often hear of practitioners

when they take a course in a community setting or attend a Polarity Yoga class. This allows them to view the work of the teacher or practitioner. The APTA also maintains a directory of practitioners organized by name, location, and practitioner status. Practitioners should provide a clear description of their scope of practice in their state and the benefits and limitations of their treatment, while maintaining professional boundaries. To better understand the scope of practice, the patient can request to review a code of ethics as well as a book of standards for the practice of Polarity Therapy.

Many people who practice Polarity Therapy are also licensed in other modalities (such as chiropractic, medicine, osteopathy, physical therapy, naturopathy, pharmaceuticals, nursing, or social work). Others, for one reason or another, have chosen not to register with the Association. Many of these people have successful and competent practices and are also good referral sources. A clinical relationship with a Polarity practitioner should be viewed in the same light as a relationship with any health care professional. The ingredients for success are the same—practitioner competence, patient compliance, and good interpersonal “chemistry.”

Barriers and Key Issues

A more widespread acceptance of Polarity Therapy is limited by several barriers. The first barrier relates to patient access, which is limited by the number of practitioners. Currently there are only about 1200 practitioners in the organization. The second barrier concerns the need for compliance. Polarity Therapy is a very specialized form of bodywork therapy, and unlike many forms such as massage, it strongly suggests or even requires good patient compliance. The third barrier is cost. Insurance generally does not cover Polarity Therapy services. As a result, a Polarity Therapy patient faces sessions that cost anywhere from \$25 to \$150 an hour. Polarity Therapy is also a labor-intensive modality that managed care and modern allopathic practice most often cannot accommodate. It has been used by allied health professionals such as physical therapists or others who segment their clinical practice into 30-, 60-, and 90-minute appointments.

The fourth barrier is the general lack of understanding of Polarity Therapy by the mainstream medical community. Training is focused on developing good skills with an emphasis on touch and sensitivity to human energy fields. Because Polarity Therapy has until recently only been viewed as an esoteric science by mainstream allopathic medicine, it has been a neglected modality.

However, during the last 20 years, the mainstream medical community has accepted Polarity Therapy to a larger degree for many reasons. Because of the growing acceptance of complementary practices and because mainstream medical personnel themselves have sought complementary treatments for their own health, they have passed this knowledge to their own patients. Many practitioners who are dually trained integrate Polarity Therapy into public health, community health, and social service settings as well as private group practice settings. During the past 20 years, universities have begun to offer Polarity courses for credit, and medical schools have offered lectures and courses in primary care, geriatrics, and psychiatric departments.

Associations

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Suggested Reading

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2. Stone R: *Polarity Therapy*, vol 2, Summertown, Tenn, 1999, Book Publishing.
 The seminal, two-volume work by Dr. Stone provides theory and principles of practice for the professional and advanced student.
3. Stone R: *Health building: the conscious art of living well*, Sebastopol, Calif, 1986, CRCS Publications.
 An outline to the self-care and nutritional program of the Polarity diet. Useful for students and patients.
4. Gordon R: *Your healing hands: the Polarity experience*, Berkeley, Calif, 1984, Wingbow Press.
 A clearly illustrated text that provides simple Polarity principles and methods for self, friends, and family.
5. Chitty J, Muller ML: *Energy exercises*, Boulder, Colo, 1990, Polarity Press.
 A comprehensive approach to Polarity Yoga. Includes illustrations and detailed directions.
6. Beaulieu J: *Polarity Therapy workbook*, New York, 1994, Bionsonic Enterprises.
 A comprehensive text based on APTA standards for students who are studying Polarity Therapy (available directly from the APTA).
7. Korn L: *Somatic empathy*, Olympia, Wash, 1996, DayKeeper Press.
 An integrative text that provides a rationale for the use of Polarity Therapy and psychotherapy for treating posttraumatic stress.

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