

POSTER PRESENTATION

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P05.11. Time, touch, and compassion: effects on autonomic nervous system and well-being

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Purpose

Compassion is critical for complementary and conventional care. This study tested the feasibility of delivering two doses of time (10 and 20 minutes) and two strategies (tactile and non-tactile) for a practitioner to non-verbally communicate compassion (NVCC) to subjects blind to the interventions.

Methods

Healthy volunteers were informed that the study was testing the effects of time and touch on the autonomic nervous system. Each subject underwent 5 sequential study periods in one study session: (1) Warm-up; (2) Control - with the practitioner while both read neutral material; (3) Rest; (4) Intervention - with practitioner meditating on lovingkindness toward the subject; and (5) Rest. Subjects were randomized to receive one of four interventions: a) 10 minutes tactile; b) 20 minutes tactile; c) 10 minutes non-tactile; or d) 20 minutes non-tactile. During all NVCC interventions, the practitioner meditated on lovingkindness toward the subject. For tactile interventions, the practitioner touched subjects on arms, legs, and hands; for non-tactile interventions, the practitioner pretended to read. Subjects were monitored continuously for autonomic activity. Subjects completed visual analog scales (VAS) for well-being, including relaxation and peacefulness, at warm-up; post-control; immediately post-intervention; and after the post-intervention rest.

Results

The 20 subjects' mean age was 24.3 ± 4 years; 16 were women. The practitioner maintained a meditative state during all interventions as reflected in lower RR, and subjects remained blind to the practitioner's meditative

activity. Overall, interventions significantly decreased HR and BP ($p < 0.01$); although other changes did not reach statistical significance, they were in the expected direction, with generally greater effects for the tactile than non-tactile strategies and for 20 minute than 10 minute doses.

Conclusion

Two strategies are feasible for blinding subjects to non-verbal communication of compassion; even with blinding, non-verbal communication of compassion affects subjects' autonomic nervous system. Replication is desirable in larger samples.

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