
*Thoughts on
Living with Cancer*

**Cancer as a
Whole-Body Illness**



by Caren S. Fried, Ph.D.

My Personal Experience

In 1994, I was told those fateful words: “You have cancer.” At that time, I was 35 years old, a biologist, wife, and mother of a two year old. I was diagnosed with lung cancer, even though I had never smoked. My cancer treatments included two major lung surgeries (which resulted in the removal of my right lung), various standard and experimental aggressive chemotherapy treatments, and numerous alternative therapies. Despite all this, my cancer persisted. But so did I!

A turning point occurred for me when I decided to focus on my health instead of my illness. I believe that cancer is an illness of the body, mind, heart, and soul. Therefore, for me being healthy meant dealing with the emotional, psychological, and spiritual issues related to cancer as well as undergoing the physical treatments. In addition to the various conventional and alternative therapies which I pursued, writing became an important part of my own healing journey with cancer. To be able to express my emotions, thoughts, and beliefs in writing was critically important for my own overall health.

These pamphlets grew from the numerous notes that I wrote every day in my healing journal. The information that is available for newly diagnosed cancer patients can sometimes be overwhelming. It was my intention, therefore, to write short pamphlets concerning various topics that deal with the practical issues of living each day with cancer. I hope that these pamphlets will encourage discussion of topics that are often difficult yet necessary to deal with and to help cancer patients and their families make the numerous decisions that need to be made during this time.

Healing is a very personal issue and each person must find his/her own path to healing from cancer. To this day, I continue to focus on my health each day, to live a full active life as a mother and wife, and to pursue a new career as a writer despite cancer. It is my hope that these pamphlets will be useful for others seeking out a healing journey while living with cancer and beyond

Caren S. Fried

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Cancer as a Whole-Body Illness

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Over time, I learned that the best measure of my overall health was simply how healthy I felt rather than the size of tumors indicated on CT scans. —C.F.

What Causes Cancer?

Cancer cells are abnormal cells that multiply uncontrollably. Large numbers of cancer cells can prevent normal cells from carrying out their functions in the body that are necessary for sustaining life. As cancer cells grow in number, eventually they form tumors. When large enough, tumors become apparent through physical examinations or on medical tests, such as x-rays, CT scans, or MRIs. Depending on their size and location, tumors may vary from being unnoticeable to the patient to causing severe pain.

Cancer has been around as long as life itself. The formation of cancer cells is essentially a natural process. Cancer cells are constantly being produced in all individuals. The critical question is what causes abnormal cells to grow uncontrollably and produce the disease cancer?



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The underlying cause of cancer is an improperly functioning healing system within the body. The human healing system consists of not only the immune system, the primary fighter of invading organisms, but also all the other physical organs in the body as well as the psychological, emotional, and spiritual components of the individual person.

What causes this healing system to function improperly? The healing system may be ineffective due to various factors including genetics, environmental toxins, or various lifestyle factors (such as nutrition, exercise, and stress). No one knows the extent to which any of these factors contributes to the development of cancer. It is thought that several of these factors may combine in such a way that the healing system of the individual is progressively weakened over a certain period of time.

Although the symptoms of cancer may seem to appear suddenly, cancer usually is not an acute illness. Most cancers are due to a long term process of weakening the healing system of the person. By viewing cancer as a process that has occurred over a period of time, it becomes apparent that the tumors seen on medical tests or found during a physical examination are not the cause of the cancer. They are, in effect, the symptoms of a chronic illness.

Treatment Of Cancer

The main goal of treating cancer through conventional Western medicine (surgery, radiation, chemotherapy) has been to eliminate or shrink tumors. The problem with this approach, however, is that the tumors are not the cause of the disease. Since tumors are an outcome of a process of abnormal cell proliferation, treatment of cancer needs to focus on improving the healing system of the individual.

While some types of conventional Western cancer treatments may be useful, they should be considered as part of an overall treatment plan that improves the healing system. Removal of tumors through surgery may be useful in removing the cancer burden on the healing system of the individual as well as decreasing the chance of metastasis (spreading of the cancer cells). However, removal of tumors through surgery should be followed by other therapies that improve the healing system of the individual as well.

Radiation and chemotherapy are problematic in that they destroy healthy cells along with the cancer cells. While radiation can be applied directly to the localized area of cancer, there is a limit to the amount of radiation that can be given due to its destruction of nearby healthy tissue. Chemotherapy is based on the idea that chemotherapeutic drugs kill rapidly dividing cancer cells. However, in most cases, too many healthy cells that are necessary for maintaining life are destroyed during treatment, thus rendering the chemotherapy ineffective. In addition, both radiation and chemotherapy severely weaken the body's healing system which may therefore actually increase the progression of the disease.

The new class of immunotherapy drugs are appealing in theory because they attempt to alter the person's immune system, yet they have produced dismal results. The body does not seem to respond favorably to injecting substances that tamper with the natural immune system.

The innate healing system of the human body is quite miraculous and yet is still way beyond our understanding. However, there are numerous types of therapies which have been used by people since ancient times through the present which have been shown to in-


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crease the health of the individual who has cancer. These so-called "alternative" therapies are extremely diverse and include ancient healing arts, such as acupuncture, herbs, Yoga, meditation, and Shamanic healing as well as therapies based on modern research such as diet and vitamins, mind-body health (including the new scientific field of psychoneuroimmunology), and the emotional and spiritual components of cancer. What all of these therapies have in common is that they focus on improving the self-healing abilities of the individual. Many studies, conducted primarily outside of mainstream cancer research, have shown that these therapies can have a positive effect on the treatment of cancer.


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From ancient wisdom to modern technological research, we can learn various ways of improving our own body's healing system, whether or not we know the details of how these therapies work. It is important to keep in mind that just as the causes of cancer are unique for each individual person, so will be the specific therapies needed for improving the healing system.

Is Cancer "Curable"?

What does it mean to be "cured" of cancer? In the medical profession, being cancer-free means there is no detectable sign of cancer upon physical examination or on medical tests. If a person had cancer and then has no detectable signs of cancer for 5 years, he/she is considered cured.

But does this mean that there are no more cancer cells in the person? If the production of cancer cells is a natural process that occurs in all individuals, then at what point do we decide that a healthy person becomes a person with cancer and vice-versa? In viewing cancer as a progressive degeneration of the healing sys-

tem instead of as an acute illness, the term "cure" becomes confusing and perhaps even inappropriate to use.

Some researchers in the field of unconventional cancer treatments have begun to refer to the treatment of cancer as "reversing" the process of cancer. By increasing the healing system of the individual, the process which has led to the diagnosis of cancer can be reversed. The development of cancer is a very complex process and no one can predict whether or not reversing the process can bring about complete health or even prolong survival. However, by using therapies that improve the healing system of the individual, it is very likely that the individual will be able to change the course of the direction of the disease, improve his/her quality of life, and even increase survival time. By viewing cancer as reversible rather than curable (or incurable), the concept of being healthy and living fully despite having cancer becomes a real possibility. Ultimately, complete reversal of the cancer process can lead to a long and healthy life.

Focus on Being Healthy

Various therapies are available that focus on improving the overall health of the individual. Therapies, such as diet, vitamins and herbal supplements, exercise, Traditional Chinese Medicine, meditation, visualization, Yoga, and others, can improve and enhance the healing system of the individual. By focusing on being healthy and boosting the healing system of the individual, it is possible to alter the course of the illness.

Reversing the course of an illness requires a large investment in time and energy on the part of the patient. The patient must learn to be an active participant in his/her recovery and be willing to be open to new


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ideas. Support from health care professionals, family, friends, and other cancer patients is also critically important.

The road to recovery from cancer will be unique for each person. An individual must learn to recognize what he/she needs to be healthy in all aspects of his/her life. This means being healthy physically, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually. The task of reversing cancer is not an easy one, but by working towards optimal health, it is possible to alter the course of this disease.

Summary

Conventional cancer treatments focus on eliminating or shrinking tumors. However, the underlying cause of cancer is an improperly functioning healing system within the body. A more holistic approach to cancer treatment focuses on improving the overall health of the person in order to reverse the cancer process. The use of alternative or complementary therapies can enhance a person's innate healing abilities. By focusing on being healthy, it is possible to alter the course of this illness and to live fully despite cancer.



Thoughts on Living with Cancer Pamphlets

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How to Be an Active Participant in Your Own Recovery:
Guidelines for the Newly Diagnosed Cancer Patient.



Coping with Hair Loss Due to Chemotherapy



Positive Thinking - Helpful or Harmful for Cancer Patients?



Suggestions for Friends and Relatives of the Cancer Patient



An Introduction to Alternative/Complementary Therapies for Cancer



Being a Parent with Cancer



Diagnosis Cancer: Why Me?



Healing and Dying



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