

Integrated Breast Cancer Care

The Holistic Model

By Greg Anderson, Founder, Cancer Recovery Group

From the moment my wife and I started what would become the Cancer Recovery Group, our approach has always been “holistic.” This means we recognize the central importance of integrating body, mind and spirit—the physical, emotional and spiritual components of health and well-being.

We have now come to understand the profound truth that health is much more than not being physically ill. We have also come to understand that breast cancer is much, much more than cells gone awry. This leads to an equally profound point of understanding: surviving breast cancer is not simply about treating illness. It is primarily about creating wellness.

We have come to this deeply-held belief based on extensive surveys and interviews with more than 16,000 cancer survivors. Along with a wonderful team of associates at the Cancer Recovery Group, we studied “what went right” with cancer patients—what led to survival.

Today I can emphatically state: orthodox medical treatment alone does not maximize one’s opportunity for cancer survival.

Having said that, I need to make clear that all I am suggesting is to be considered in addition to, not in place of conventional medical care. That’s what the term “integrated cancer care” stands

for. Evidence abounds that when a patient integrates complementary and even several alternative approaches into a conventional bio-medical cancer treatment program, it is very likely to result in better outcomes, reduced side-effects, a greater sense of control, and much improved quality of life.

While the Cancer Recovery Group certainly supports each individual's choices and decisions in treatment, be they strictly conventional, complimentary or alternative, we have become much more assertive in urging the integrated approach. The work takes three forms:

- Educate. Helping patients understand their diagnosis of breast cancer, the spectrum of treatment options and what one can do to help themselves.
- Empower. Guiding patients to actually implement these strategies in their breast cancer recovery journey, creating a new way of life.
- Encourage. Supporting by offering inspiration and hope that no matter how difficult, patients can survive and even thrive through the breast cancer experience.

Those are big promises. The integrated breast cancer care strategy makes good on those promises. I want you to examine and explore the implementation of this holistic strategy, to help you apply these ideas in simple understandable steps. These ideas offer you a plan to get well and stay well for the remainder of your life however long or short that time may be. The end result is a unique body-mind-spirit approach to health and healing. These strategies improve the ability to deal rationally with a cancer diagnosis, make intelligent and informed choices in treatment, and mobilize all the resources available to you in the healing process. In the end, the

integrated cancer care strategy helps turn the crisis of breast cancer into a unique opportunity to live far more happily and healthfully than ever before.

Your Current State of Health

In the early years of our work, we looked to the cellular biology of cancer as the starting point. That was a mistake. Integrated cancer care is built on a platform that extends well beyond the tumor model.

Today, the starting point is to view each person's state of health as a result of the many interactive components of body, mind and spirit. As we have stated, cell biology and its genetics may be a component but it is more often the result, the end game, of a host of other lifestyle choices. These include nutrition, exercise, attitudes, social support, and spirituality. This definition of health also includes the environment, the air we breathe, the water we drink and especially environmental toxins and the sea of chemicals in which we live. Lifestyle also includes our psychological and emotional make-up and the way in which we process all the above factors.

In the current medical culture, there is a pervasive belief that genetics explains cancer and is the basis of a cancer cure. I hold in my hands a New York Times article that begins, "The hope to cure cancer rests with finding the rogue genes." A prominent weekly news magazine recently proclaimed, *Genomics: The Promise of Life*. Epigenetics, the study of processes that change cells but do not alter the actual DNA gene sequence, is touted as the next cancer breakthrough.

Millions of research dollars are being spent to discover treatments that may turn off certain genetic cancer switches.

Yes, cancer does involve genes and genetic mutations. But you and I possess the ability, in large measure, to switch on and off the expression of those genes. And you and I can accomplish this naturally. Even the preeminent leaders in the epigenetics field conclude and agree that lifestyle has a massive influence on disease prevention and treatment. In fact, lifestyle choices can reverse or control a variety of genetic predispositions. Some basic examples: if you smoke cigarettes, the chances are greater that your cells will be damaged and your lungs much more susceptible to cancer. Eat with nutritional intelligence and the chances are your cellular mutations will successfully self-resolve. Daily exercise absolutely changes your bio-chemistry and this influences cellular biology. So too, our emotional responses. Point being, lifestyle choice readily triggers epigenetic mechanisms that can assist you in resolving breast cancer and prevent its recurrence.

Let's be clear. Our starting point is not genes gone haywire, it is your state of health. So how is it? How healthy are you? If you will step back and observe, you will see many complex influences working around and through you. And it's more than just physical well-being.

One way to assess your state of holistic well-being is to ask yourself a series of questions, holding yourself accountable for honest answers. The questions may include:

Physical well-being:

Do I truly practice high nutritional intelligence?

Do I exercise each day?

Do I seek health guidance from competent health guides?

Attitudinal well-being:

Do I believe my life is filled with possibilities or obstacles?

Do I see my happiness as a choice or dependent on circumstances?

Do I understand my beliefs and perceptions are the source of both my peace and pain?

Emotional well-being:

Do I possess an awareness of my dominant emotional style?

Do I feel free to express my feelings or do I keep a stiff upper lip?

Do I understand how to choose and manage my emotions?

Social well-being:

Do I feel a close connection with others?

Do I both give and receive attention?

Do I have someone with whom I can share everything?

Spiritual well-being:

Do I have a sense there is “more,” a divine part to life?

Do I have an intimate connection with the divine?

Do I know what to do to establish and strengthen that connection?

While certainly not exhaustive, this more complete picture of one's state of health is central to an understanding of getting well again. The result of such an understanding is the ability to mobilize the whole person—body, mind and spirit—not only for recovery from cancer, but also to achieve your best life now.

This holistic understanding is at odds with breast cancer orthodoxy. It takes us well beyond cell biology and is in stark contrast to the conventional medical approach that is the norm in Western medicine today. The biomedical understanding of health focuses exclusively on the physical dimensions of well-being and envisions our body as a machine. Disease is considered a malfunction of the machine. According to this disease model, a diagnosis like breast cancer is a specific failure that can be remedied by correcting that failure. This worldview very logically leads to mechanical fixes that predominantly rely on surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy.

Medical treatments certainly have a time and place in many breast cancer recovery programs. However, I have come to understand they are not to occupy the dominant place. Instead, after over a 30 years of study and experience, I now believe these treatments are temporary steps to allow the body the opportunity to alleviate the burden of cancer. Once the burden is less, the whole person can then go forward in the creation of health and healing. This is viewed as a radical position, I know. I also believe it is totally accurate and completely trustworthy, the rational alternative to increasingly toxic, invasive, and experimental cancer treatments alone.

A Different Kind of Illness

We have already briefly explored that breast cancer is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It has a wide spectrum of causes and influences including genetic, nutritional, stress-related, environmental and even emotional. Some of these causes are direct, some indirect. The physical symptoms resulting from these causes are the cellular component of cancer. At the cell level, we can accurately think of cancer as the mutation of genes resulting in the irregular growth of abnormal cells. The operative words here are *irregular* and *abnormal*.

Healthy cells of the body grow in predictable patterns. As they wear out, they are replaced in an orderly manner by just the right number of new healthy cells. Cancerous cells grow in uncontrolled and unpredictable patterns. Their growth serves no useful biological purpose. They often threaten the entire body. The cells themselves are mutant, changed in ways that limit their function. If you have a confirmed diagnosis of breast cancer, you have this mutant cellular condition. It is one of more than one-hundred types of cancers, each having its own site and distinguishing characteristics.

A second dimension of cancer is an inefficient immune system. Your understanding of this second point is of vital importance, critical in the decision to do all you can to help yourself get well. Your immune system is the first and most powerful defense your body has against cancer. For years you have periodically produced mutant cells which were potentially cancerous. In

most cases the immune system was there to “clean up” the problems. Now your immune system has ceased doing so in an efficient enough manner to ensure your health.

Rebuilding immune function is central to getting well and staying well. My loving intention is to give you specific steps to help you respond with maximum intelligence to this diagnosis and help you rebuild your self-healing functions. The basic action points are:

1. **Examine.** Step back from the day-to-day pressures of your life to evaluate your current situation in its entirety.
2. **Discover.** Assess both current life issues that must be changed as well as future needs that must be met.
3. **Plan.** Create a simple plan to restore health and total well-being.
4. **Implement.** Work in partnership with health advisors who have your confidence. Begin a self-care plan to create whole-person well-being.
5. **Review.** Conduct quarterly reviews of your progress, making adjustments as necessary.

Taken together, these action points will play the central role in mobilizing all your healing options and capacities, both external and internal. You will then live vibrantly well for as long as you live. Living vibrantly well . . . that is a wonderful definition of health and healing.

When you make the decision that you will live vibrantly well, no matter what the state of your physical health, you have put the body-mind-spirit connection to work. It is real. It is powerful. When used in conjunction with prudent medical care, you can be assured you have created the optimum environment for healing. Your medical team will do all it can to fix the malfunctioning

machine. Your task is to do all you can to create wellness and enhance your self-healing capacity.

Enhancing self-healing is accomplished through your own choices—your physical, emotional and spiritual lifestyle. Abundant authoritative, scientifically-validated evidence exists that the immune system is profoundly influenced by lifestyle choices. Few people would argue that tobacco use, improper diet and lack of exercise are obvious deterrents to maximum health. So is mismanaged toxic stress, which fills the body with adrenaline and cortisone derivatives, both known to inhibit immune function. Something as basic as your emotional response to the communication of a cancer diagnosis is a factor. The message, “It’s breast cancer,” is received with pervasive fear by most women. That fear can paralyze the recipient emotionally and psychologically at a time when intelligent action is required. And a spiritually toxic outlook after a breast cancer diagnosis can make a difficult situation a living hell. All of these responses have a negative physiological impact on immune function.

The comprehensive integrated holistic emphasis of Cancer Recovery Group’s plan, and the implementation of the strategies that flow from this approach, should not cast dispersions on the validity of truly scientific medicine. I do not encourage you to go back to the use of folk medicine, though I do have the utmost respect for the loving family doctor, the ones who listen, show compassion and treat the whole person.

Many times over the past thirty years of our work I have been asked to provide “proof” of my methods. The fact is, I do not have proof in the form of double-blind clinical research studies.

But I can point to evidence, a preponderance of evidence, that points to the connection between nutrition, exercise and social support and recovery from cancer. We have completed careful content analysis of the 16,000+ survivor surveys and interviews. I am keenly aware that some people do not equate this evidence with proof. But understand this: lack of double-blind studies is not equal to disproof.

Many widely-accepted orthodox breast cancer treatment protocols are based on lack of complete proof. In fact, there is a long and sordid history of conventional treatments that not only prove to be disappointing but also dangerous. The drug Avastin is a prime example. Just a few years ago, the Food and Drug Administration gave this drug accelerated approval for breast cancer treatment. The approval was based on a single clinical trial. The result showed that Avastin, when added to standard chemotherapy, slowed the progression of tumors. However, it did not extend lives. So they had evidence but not proof. Two follow-up trials by Genentech, the maker of Avastin, also found tumor progression was held at bay but for even shorter periods of time. And once again, lives were not extended. Worse, some patients suffered very serious and disabling side effects including severe bleeding, stroke, heart problems, severe high blood pressure, and the perforation of the gastrointestinal tract. Approximately 1-percent of the clinical trial patients died from causes directly related to the drug. Thankfully, the F.D.A. advisory committee voted 12 to 1 that the drug's approval for breast cancer should be withdrawn.

Proof? Not with Avastin. Evidence, scant evidence? Yes. But the F.D.A. still gave approval, even though it was forced to rescind it. Better quality evidence exists for the anticancer properties of broccoli, raspberries, green tea and a host of other natural foods. But because they

cannot be patented, no clinical trials have been completed. There is no money in it. That is why it is so critically important for both public and private institutions to finance human studies on the link between foods, cancer prevention, and cancer treatment. Even if there is only evidence, I ask you to join me in not waiting for clinical trials. The *Nutrition as Medicine* diet we recommend does not expose those who follow it to any risks. Instead, it produces health benefits that have a profound effect on cancer.

Rene Dubos, who discovered the first antibiotic put to medical use, and considered one of the great twentieth-century leaders in medicine and ecology, may have said it best when at the end of his career he stated: *I have always thought that the only trouble with scientific medicine is that it is not scientific enough. Modern medicine will become truly scientific only when patients and their medical teams learn to manage the forces of the body and the mind that operate via vis medicatrix natureae* (the healing power of nature). That is exactly what I am attempting to help you do—to help you manage the forces of the body, mind and spirit, that when added to the forces of rational medical care results in optimal health and healing.

If you have cancer today, you can't wait for years of clinical research to yield absolute proof of these points. So don't wait. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Becoming proactive in creating your own health and healing will not only influence your quality of life but it will also influence your quantity of life. Integrate these principles with the best minimally-invasive, least-toxic treatments medicine has to offer. Therein you will find optimum success.