

CANCER

Proof and a Plan for Healing

Sandra Tonn

THE CENTRE FOR INTEGRATED HEALING in Vancouver is changing the paradigm of cancer care. This reality is life saving in many cases, and life changing in most. People deemed dying by conventional medicine's standards are more alive than they've ever been before, and it's not because they chose complementary medicine over conventional. It's because they were supported with a new, integrated approach—a bridge between two seemingly separate worlds.

I recently joined a group of people with cancer at the centre for its two-day introductory program to

learn about this approach. It was an enlightening and inspiring introduction to a reality in which patients have more to do with their healing than their oncologists. Part way through the first day of my attendance, I realized I was sitting in on history in the making.

"The cure for cancer will be a multi-factoral approach," says Hal Gunn, MD, resident physician and



Dr. Hal Gunn

co-director of the centre. He, along with alternative cancer therapy pioneer Dr. Roger Rogers, has designed a new model for cancer treatment. According to this evolved perspec-

tive, which is based on a whole-person approach to healing, the patient plays a fundamental role in recovery.

Cancer does not develop overnight. Decisions about how to treat it, in the majority of cases, need not be made overnight, either. At the centre, we learned that the foundation of recovery involves a number of elements including emotional connection with others, healthful diet, rest, vitamins, complementary therapies and, yes, conventional medical therapies. "It's all an alternative—including surgery," says Philip Wood, integrative bodyworker, counsellor and facilitator of the introductory program.

Many in attendance shared their anger and frustration about experiences with their medical doctors and oncologists. One man, a young lawyer who was obviously suffering from the effects of his cancer, voiced anger at the injustice. He said he had under-

Study Shows Diet Affects Cancer

Data from a study carried out in 35 countries indicate that the fraction of daily calories derived from animal products shows a strong correlation with increased breast cancer mortality. Women living in countries with high fat diets generally eat a higher fraction of animal products, drink more alcohol and eat less fish than women living in countries with low fat diets. Therefore, over their lifetimes, they produce more estrogen and more insulin-like growth factor, which are associated with increased breast cancer risk. A second finding from the study is that exposure to sunshine, which is an absorbable source of vitamin D for the skin, substantially reduces breast cancer mortality.

Cancer, Jan. 1, 2002

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stood from his family doctor that complementary medicine was a waste of time. "No doctor, nurse, the cancer agency, no one told me to seek any outside remedy." The reality of the gap between conventional and complementary cancer treatment became intimately apparent when his own sister, whom he loves dearly, and a doctor, advised against complementary therapies.

The lawyer, along with many in the room, admitted that until recently he thought he couldn't do anything about his cancer and that his life was in his doctor's hands. He now considers himself in control and his naturopath as the one who truly sees the big picture, which includes conventional medicine.

Others in attendance reported many unsettling stories and accounts of death sentences. But with a grace that included sincere warmth, caring and professionalism,

Dr. Gunn, who spends a noteworthy three hours visiting with patients, defended those in conventional medicine, explaining that they are not trained or experienced in these

areas and that the current model for cancer treatment is outdated.

He and all the staff at the Centre for Integrated Healing work with the best intentions and open hearts to embrace, include and build ties with the conventional

medical world. They speak highly of the support and co-operation they receive from many who are also eager to build the bridge, including the BC Cancer Agency.

Dr. Gunn encouraged all in attendance to step outside the old belief system and look at a new one. "It's a more human, common-sense approach to cancer care," he says. The old model only treats the tumour. However, the tumour is only a small part of a person. So while chemotherapy, radiation and

"THE NEW MODEL IS SCIENTIFICALLY A MORE VALID MODEL OF CANCER CARE."

Emotional Support Enhances Survival Time

A landmark study by Dr. Spiegel of Stanford University's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences has demonstrated the effects of psychosocial support in the lives of women diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. The application of supportive-expressive group therapy in the women with terminal disease not only improved the quality of their lives, but significantly enhanced survival time to almost twice that of the women who did not participate in the therapy. This research used a rigorous scientific methodology to address large and important questions regarding the relationship between psychosocial and biological variables in breast cancer and possible mechanisms through which they may be related, and has spawned a new line of research on the health effects of psychosocial support. A recent study out of George Washington University Medical Center found that for women diagnosed with moderately serious breast cancer, a large network of supportive friends and relatives reduce the risk of cancer recurrence and death by 60 per cent over seven years.

The Lancet, Oct. 14, 1989; 888-891; *USA Today*, March 9, 2001

Centre Begins First-Ever Study

In co-operation with the BC Cancer Agency, patient recruitment will begin this fall for a first-ever study of its kind that will be done by the Centre for Integrated Healing. The randomized, controlled trial study, which is the gold standard of clinical evaluation, will assess the value of a wholistic, complementary cancer care program for patients diagnosed with cancer incurable by conventional means. "The study originated from a desire to demonstrate that what we do is effective," says Karen Cooke, the centre's research manager. Measuring the quality of life, survival and overall cost to the health-care system will be the objectives of the three- to four-year study. Results will hopefully lead to more research and, in turn, oblige the government to consider how it allocates health-care funding.

surgery can play a role, one should treat a person as a whole. "There is growing evidence that the new model is scientifically a more valid model of cancer care." Emotional support, meditation, a healthful diet, exercise, stress reduction and immune enhancement, among many other options, are essential for true healing. A patient may find one or a variety of these options are required for recovery, depending on his or her needs, beliefs and situation.

"The human body is an incredible healing machine," says Dr. Rogers. With the new model for treatment, the patient is both a participant and the director of the healing program. The new model allows for hope no matter what the diagnosis is. Indeed, many of those in the room, hoping to find their way past cancer to true health, have arrived at the centre because they've heard stories, first-hand in many cases, about others who have been helped, guided and are now living a life that's better, fuller and more authentic than before. "There's nothing more powerful to the immune system than living a life fully, the way you want to live it," informs Dr. Gunn.

The expert and specialized team of professionals at the centre believe the first step to recovery is the will to live. One of the many hundreds of inspirational stories that have

been born out of the centre is that of Jack Fun. Diagnosed with cancer and given three months to live, Jack is alive and well four years later. After going through a time of depression and confusion, Jack says, "I decided that I did not have to accept this." After learning about his rights and options, he chose five treatments of radiation, but did not like the way he felt afterwards and declined chemotherapy. Jack took advantage of support groups, started to meditate and run, changed his diet and followed a vitamin and supplement program along with a natural therapy to stimulate his immune system. He reduced the stress in his life and today proudly announces that he has no pain. He feels cancer was a gift because of his current health and happiness.

"Stories are important as evidence," Gunn says. But he is quick to back them up with the latest studies and statistics, knowing that people need evidence to defend their choices to those who may be opposed.

The new model of complementary and conventional medicine requires a new way of thinking, but those at the centre are hopeful that in five years or so it will be the norm. I'm certain that if it does, the Centre for Integrated Healing will have had a lot to do with this

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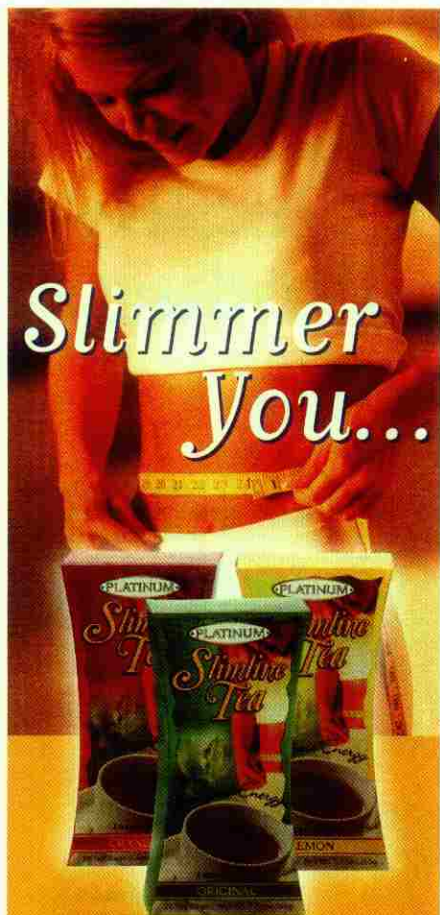
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change. The centre will begin a randomized controlled study this fall—the first of its kind—to show the effectiveness of the new integrated cancer care model. While proof is not a question in their minds, or in the minds of the many who have been touched by their work, it continues to be the defence of those who are still in an old belief system. The first-hand proof I witnessed at the centre is, in my mind, more scientific than the stacks of studies and statistics available, and more logical and exciting than anything I've ever seen in a conventional doctor's office, laboratory or operating room.

I said thank you and good luck to those in the group. They were not teary or dying people. They were people with information to read, decisions to make, practitioner appointments to attend, new friends and new hope. Their relief and determination were apparent. With true guidance and vision, they were beginning a road to recovery by choosing a bridge of integration. ■

Editor's Note: The above article was not written to bring more people to the Centre for Integrated Healing. In fact, the centre is not in need of clients. It currently guides 500 patients per year through the healing program, which is only a fraction of the 18,000 diagnosed each year in British Columbia and 30,000 across Canada. This already harrowing statistic for cancer incidence will increase by as much as 70 per cent by 2015. My purpose for writing was in line with the goal of the centre itself: to encourage others to adopt a new belief system. I hope to see many centres such as this one across Canada in the future.

While the centre's medical staff are the first physicians in Canada to be funded by a provincial government to provide complementary care, it is a non-profit society and is funded largely by private donations. If you would like to show support, call (604) 734-7125 or send donations to the Centre for Integrated Healing, 200-1330 West 8th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V6H 4A6.

Selenium and Prostate Cancer

Scientists at Stanford University have shown that high blood levels of selenium were associated with a four- to five-fold decrease in the risk of prostate cancer. The researchers also noted that selenium levels decrease with age—an interesting discovery since it is known that risk of prostate cancer increases with age. Supplementation of 200 micrograms per day is recommended. Selenium is found in Brazil nuts, whole grains, sunflower seeds and seafood.

Journal of Urology 2001; 166:2034-8

Prayer Helps Healing

In a double-blind study by Krucoff et al. (2001), some 150 cardiac patients were assigned to one of four groups: a control group or touch therapy, stress relaxation, imagery or distant prayer. Eight prayer groups from different religious affiliations around the world prayed for patients assigned to them. Researchers tracked clinical indicators as well as incidents of stroke, heart attack, heart failure, death, length of hospital stay and need for surgery. The adverse outcomes in the prayer group (who did not know if they were being prayed for or not) were 50 to 100 per cent fewer than those who were not prayed for. Patients who received other complementary therapies had a 30 per cent reduction in adverse outcomes.

American Heart Journal 142 (5): 760-769, 2001

