The Elements of Healing and Wellness Post Diagnosis of Cancer: A Review of the Literature and a Personal Account

Honors Thesis: Tiffany Bystra, OTS
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Tiffany’s Story
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- Stage 4B Hodgkin’s Lymphoma: Classical Nodular Sclerosing
- Metastasis to liver, spleen, and bone marrow
- 1st line treatment = 6 months chemotherapy involving Adriamycin, Bleomycin, Vinblastine, and Dacarbazine
Tiffany’s Story
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• Wellness Warrior!

• Remission Date: October 13th, 2014

• New chapter of life focusing on longevity and wellness in all aspects of life

• Healing not only physically, but mentally and emotionally as well
Objectives of Thesis

- What can I be doing to promote my physical, mental, and spiritual wellness on this journey?
- What can I do to promote longevity from a survivorship standpoint?
- What does it mean to take care of myself, or to be “well”? What does this look like?
- How can I use my experience as an emerging healthcare professional?
- What is the research supporting the use of various holistic interventions?
Introduction to Holistic Healing and Wellness

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 1948).

• First hand experience in knowing that disease does not just strike the body; it affects all areas of life
• Approaching wellness and healing holistically is important to achieve best outcomes
• When faced with the biggest and scariest battle in your life, you want to be armed with the most artillery you can get
• Healing vs. wellness
Introduction to Holistic Healing and Wellness

“The Six Dimensions of Health”: Dr. Bill Hettler, co-founder of the National Wellness Institute (1976)
Introduction to Holistic Healing and Wellness

• Holistic healing and wellness in one’s cancer journey calls us to look beyond the physical being and consider the well-being of the entire person and their environmental demands.

• An individual is so much more than a cancer diagnosis; we are mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, aunts, uncles, siblings, teachers, and plumbers, etc.

• Individuals who have been diagnosed with cancer often have lives that have been shifted in the biggest earthquake they’ve ever experienced. We need care in all essences of our being, not just our physical being.
Healing and Wellness: The Mind

• Stress Management and Immune Functioning
  • Identification of rogue cells through immune surveillance
  • Chronic stress and time for wound healing (Gouin & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2011)

• Journaling and Gratitude
  • “Medium for reflection, meditative activity, and self-awareness (Charles, 2010)
  • Regular journaling strengthens cells of immune system (Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988)
  • Confessional Writing

• Physical burning of sorrows
Healing and Wellness: The Mind

• Okinawa, Japan: Hot Spot for Longevity

• Ikigai= “purpose of living”, “reason for waking in the morning”
Healing and Wellness: The Mind

- Malignant Humor!
- Provides some relief from negative feelings and worry
- “There are elements in both wellness and humor that invite moderation and emotional maturity while attenuating obsessional thinking, rigid behavior, and extremeness of response” (Salameh & Fry, 2001).
Healing and Wellness: The Mind

• Coping Mechanisms
  • Guided Imagery
  • Progressive Muscle Relaxation
  • Identify and Monitor Stressors
  • Dedicate time for relaxation or hobbies
  • Pranayamas and Breath work (Weintraub, 2005)
    • Ujjayi: ocean sound breaths
    • Nadi Sodhana: purifying breaths
    • Kumbhaka: retention breathing

• Smiling and Compassionate Acts

• Mindfulness: entails “observing sights, sounds, and other sensations, including internal bodily sensations and thoughts, without being carried away by them” (Ricard, Lutz, & Davidson, 2014)

• Advocation and Reliable Information Sourcing
Healing and Wellness: The Body

- Anti-Angiogenesis: Eat to Starve Cancer
  - Foods can encourage or limit blood vessel growth to developing malignant tumors
- Increase phytochemical intake, fiber, phytates, antioxidants (through use of whole foods rather than supplements)
  - Inverse relationship between colon and breast cancer risk and daily consumption of fiber containing foods (Dong, He, Wang, & Qin, 2011)
- To increase fiber intake: choose whole-seat bread instead of white, brown rice instead of white, choose to keep peel or skins on vegetables and potatoes, add beans to diet! (PCRM, 2015)
Healing and Wellness: The Body

Nutrition: Fighting Disease with your Fork

- **Fruits**— apples, black raspberries, blueberries, cranberries, grapes, strawberries
- **Vegetables**— cruciferous family (broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, Brussel sprouts), sweet potatoes, garlic
- **Whole Grains**— quinoa, whole wheat
- **Beans/ Legumes**— black and lentils: phytates, fiber
- **Nuts and Seeds**— walnuts, chia, flax: contain healthy fats
- **Other Foods**— turmeric, mushrooms
Healing and Wellness: The Body

- Exercise does not necessarily mean the gym! Purposeful and functional activities that are meaningful to the individual
Healing and Wellness: The Body

• Rebounding and lymphatic system: antigravity movements act as “pump” for lymphatic system, where heart is pump for circulatory

• Rebounding can influence white blood cell count, providing a greater defense system to destroy cancer cells. (Wellman, 2003)
Is it Diet, Exercise, or Both?

Healing and Wellness: The Spirit

• Process of finding a connection for something outside of ourselves while incorporating beliefs and values
• Finding meaning in life and experiencing it completely and consciously
• Connection to higher being or purpose
• May feel out of touch with true self, disconnected from universe, feeling unbalanced or lost
• May include a form of spiritual practice or form of worship
Healing and Wellness: The Spirit

• Creating an altar
• Rituals for healing
• Affirmations: Positive, self-affirming statements spoken out loud; counteracts negative internal thoughts
• Visualization: melting tumors and exploding cancer cells
• Yoga Practice: “mind-body therapies, such as yoga, can support pharmacological and psychological therapies by improving autonomic responses to stress and self-regulating coping behaviors” (Kinser, Goehler, & Taylor, 2012).
• Prayer
• Creating room for acceptance

Recognize event for what it is and view as challenge to facilitate personal growth
Healing and Wellness: The Spirit

• “Meditation training increases one’s ability to better control and buffer basic physiological responses—infiammation or levels of a stress hormone” (Ricard, Lutz, & Davidson, 2014)
• Inhibit genetic aging and promote repair
• Telomere lengthening: “some forms of meditation may have salutary effects on telomere length by reducing cognitive stress and stress arousal and increasing positive states of mind and hormonal factors that may promote telomere maintenance” (Epel, Daubenmier, Moskowitz, Folkman, & Blackburn, 2009)
Healing Relationships

- Social support
- Encouraging openness
- Allow for sadness and negative emotions
- Learn to LISTEN nonjudgmentally
- Keep things light... cancer is not main topic
- Letting people help you

- Diagnosis can mean loss in a variety of avenues: loss of independence, loss of friends or relationships, threat of loss of future, loss of well-being, loss of hair, loss of role, loss of sexual function, loss of physical integrity/ strength, loss of life expectancy, loss of control
Healing Relationships


- H-Hopeful
- E-Empathetic
- A-Attentive
- L-Loving
- I-Intentional
- N-Nourishing
- G-Grateful
Concluding Statements

• Healing and Wellness after a cancer diagnosis should be approached holistically

• The Mind-Body connection has powerful influence on our overall health and wellbeing

• Developing positive and appropriate coping mechanisms for stress management is critical for wellness

• Nutrition is of utmost importance to ensuring adequate nourishment for a body that is being taxed from cancer treatment

• It is possible to fight disease with your fork! Taking active steps to be strategic about food choices can influence outcomes. Including a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds can promote health.
Concluding Statements

• Maintaining physical activity is important and does not have to include strenuous workouts

• Acting upon one’s spiritual preferences in their healing journey can help the individual make their healing experience meaningful and purposeful while promoting reflection and facilitating conscious life experience

• Just as we would use rituals to signify major life events, rituals can be used during the cancer journey

• There are a variety of components that constitute a healing relationship, and these principles can be applied by friends, family, and professionals alike to facilitate healing and wellness
Concluding Statements

“One day she finally grasped that unexpected things were going to happen in life. And with that she realized the only control she had was how she chose to handle them. So, she made the decision to survive using courage, humor, and grace. She was the queen of her own life and the choice was hers” – Kathy Kinney
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