



A WHOLISTIC APPROACH TO BREAST CANCER
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The subject of breast cancer and complementary approaches to treatment of this disease is very complex. What is presented here is a general introduction to a wholistic viewpoint on the subject of breast cancer. Most women at some point in their lives worry about breast cancer since the number of women being diagnosed with the disease has been increasing at an alarming rate. Depending on where a woman lives, the rate of diagnosis can be as high as one in three women who will get it in their lifetime. Many women know a family member or a friend who has suffered with the disease and perhaps even died. While recent reports indicate that women are living longer with breast cancer they do not show that more and more women are being diagnosed with this horrible disease. When we compare statistics in the United States with those of women in Asia, for example, we find that breast cancer rates are four to seven times higher in the United States. This difference is not dependent on genetics alone since Asian women acquire the same rates as American women after several generations have lived in the United States. Clearly other factors are at work. Wholistic medicine can provide a much broader viewpoint of the causes of this disease and the modalities which treat them.

Western medicine tends to be reductionist in its approach to the human body - seeing the body as if it were some isolated conglomeration of parts. In medicine structure dominates - organs are removed, nerves severed, and powerful pharmaceuticals administered without considering the consequences of such radical actions on the delicate bio-system of the living body. We see this same structural viewpoint in psychology where the mind is seen simply as the brain, with no existence separate from the structure of that

organ. This materialist perspective creates an unnatural view of the human being, one where the dynamic, interactive quality of life processes are not acknowledged.

In comparison the philosophy of wholism, which is common to many cultures and medical systems throughout the world, emphasizes the principle that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." It sees human beings not simply as a collection of organs, muscles, bones and nerves but rather as a complex living organism, many systems integrating, resulting in an ongoing dynamic being. Human beings have physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual components that are intertwined with intricate connections which confront the reductionist approach. Human beings do not exist in isolation from the universe, they are part of it. Each person exists within their own, individual physical, psychological and spiritual condition that is critical to understanding the meaning of their health. The word "heal" literally means "to make whole" and to understand health, one must have some understanding of the whole person. This wider perspective, that mind and body really cannot be differentiated, but must be seen as a single entity, engaged in an ongoing dynamic called life is crucial to the wholistic viewpoint and to the prevention and treatment of disease. There cannot be a psychological problem that does not manifest in the physical body and there cannot be a physical problem that does not have psychological impact. The concept of wholism, which expresses the unity of mind and body, is rooted in a different approach to health care. It is impossible to treat a breast, or arm, or lung, isolated from the dynamic of a living being. Since there is no division of mind and body, all diseases are of the mindbody, treatments are for the mindbody, and methods of maintaining the health focus on the mindbody. Wholistic health sees the most profound power of health and healing to be inherent in the mindbody. Therefore, wholistic health practices seek to support and encourage healing whenever possible and seek natural, safe, minimally invasive methods to help the mindbody to heal itself. Practitioners of wholistic health tend to see themselves as facilitators of the healing process, rather than as the source of healing. Wholistic health practitioners educate their patients and teach them methods and ways of removing sources of abuse to their health. Wholistic approaches to health care are concerned not only with treatments that support the body's energy system but with lifestyle changes, education and very importantly, patient responsibility. Patients must recognize that they must take responsibility for their own health and well-being and work cooperatively with a professional. This means that an individual

must take a pro-active role in the process: reading, investigating, learning, making changes in daily habits, and eating and exercising properly. The potential of wholistic health care is actualized only when an individual makes the decision to be an active participant in their own wellness.

That said, there are two different avenues from which women can approach breast cancer – prevention and treatment. Treatment can further be divided into two categories – strictly alternative treatment or complementary - a combination of wholistic treatment in combination with traditional allopathic therapies. All of these choices contain the same elements for healing the body.

Proper nutrition is a major key in both avenues. The National Academy of Sciences estimates that 60% of women's cancers and 40% of men's cancers are due to nutritional factors. In women, the cancers that are most closely connected to nutritional influences are breast and endometrial cancers. The importance of a low fat, high fiber diet to prevent cancer has been documented in many scientific circles and many experts recommend eating less fat. We know that casein, a protein found in milk and used in the production of cheese is also used to make glue and plastics. A high dairy intake leads to what in Chinese medicine is called mucus or phlegm production which can congeal in the body producing growths and masses. Therefore eating less dairy and less meat is a key to prevention as well as increasing the amount of organic fruits, vegetables, legumes, seeds and grains. Plant estrogens or isoflavonoids, found in soy products, can interfere with the body's estrogen and potentially cut a woman's risk and may explain why Asian women have such low rates of breast cancer. Some animal studies also show that diets high in polyunsaturated fats such as corn oil foster tumor formation whereas olive oil does not have this effect. A study published in the esteemed journal Lancet in 1994 found that bile acids characteristically found in the intestines were also found in breast cyst fluid demonstrating a link between the digestive process and the formation of masses in the breasts. The study concluded "It is likely, therefore, that bile acids present in the microenvironment of breast tissue affect its biological activities. The exchange and concentration mechanisms for bile acids also apply to a broad range of organic compounds, including food preservatives and drugs." A 1993 study showed that the risk of breast cancer was four times higher in women who had high levels of pesticide in their blood versus women with lower levels. Other studies have found traces of pesticide in breast tissue samples. Clearly a plant-

based diet should be one that utilizes organically grown foods and distilled water, so that most cancer causing agents have been removed.

In addition many of our processed foods also contain a large number of synthetic chemicals while many of our meats and milk have hormones added to them which can catalyze disease in the human body. We don't know the long range effects of genetically modified food which is banned in a number of European countries and called "frankenfood". Numerous toxins found in the environment can injure tissues and organs, and the failure of the body to detoxify such chemicals, leading to their storage and accumulation can result in neurological damage as well as cancers.

Women interested in breast cancer prevention should also consider yearly detoxification diets under the supervision of a health professional. Such detoxification efforts should be undertaken in the summertime, when the climate is more suitable for lighter eating and internal cleansing. Detoxification may include fasting, juicing, various types of enemas for colon cleansing and the removal of toxins from the colon and liver. Research also indicates that diet has an important role in the body's ability to detoxify chemicals and drugs. Nutrient deficiencies and imbalances can prevent proper detoxification from occurring. For example, toxins which are fat soluble are very easily absorbed in the body but very difficult to excrete, therefore they tend to build up internally. Certain enzymes needed to convert fat soluble chemicals to water soluble chemicals may be deficient thus promoting carcinogenesis. Detoxification also utilizes many antioxidants, certain vitamins and minerals. The wholistic movement has long used chlorophyll for detoxification, specifically wheat grass juice and barley grass juice. There are several books that have been published on the subject of wheatgrass and its application to cancer and other diseases. Chlorophyll has been shown to clean as well as support the blood, removing toxins from the system.

In short, there is quite an extensive body of knowledge demonstrating that diet plays a major modifying role in chemical carcinogenesis. The body's natural detoxification channels are largely affected by protein, carbohydrate, fat and micronutrient ingestion. The absence of some nutrients and the presence of highly processed foods, preservatives and chemical additives, hormones, nitrates – tend to foster cancers while organic, unrefined natural foods, complex carbohydrates, certain phytoestrogens, plant flavonoids and cruciferous vegetables help protect the body and can be anti-carcinogenic.

While proper nutrition and detoxification are essential for prevention, the same techniques can be utilized once someone has received a diagnosis of breast cancer. In the latter case, the patient must undertake a serious commitment to a completely vegetarian lifestyle, in essence starving the cancer of animal protein which is a cell builder, and detoxing the body of harmful and toxic cancer causing agents. Such a regimen is essential and may involve certain vitamins, minerals, herbs and other forms of supplementation and can also be utilized in conjunction with traditional western treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation provided the patient is working with a skilled wholistic health care professional.

Exercise is another very important factor. Many studies have demonstrated the importance of even moderate exercise, one to three hours a week. Exercise improves the circulation of blood and energy in the body and helps with detoxification as well as hormonal balance. Certain forms of exercise, such as Hatha Yoga, Tai Chi Chuan and Qi Gong, are rooted in the principles of energy medicine. These forms of exercise help to balance the body's vital energies, restoring the energy system so that the body can help to heal itself. In China there are hospitals that focus on helping to heal cancer through rigorous Qi Gong exercises. The sicker the patient or the more advanced that disease, the more exercise is recommended. These are very specific simple but powerful exercises that are aimed at healing, balancing and building the energy system that can change the course and direction of the cancer and bring the body back to health. It is very important that Qi Gong exercises be learned from an advanced practitioner who is teaching a style with a history of health benefits. It is not something that should be learned from a video or from someone who is practicing only a short time. A complete exercise routine would include energy building exercises in combination with cardiovascular exercises and moderate weight lifting where applicable.

Wholistic health shares a great deal with Traditional Chinese Medicine, the oldest and most well documented system of medicine in the world, written evidence dating back over five thousand years. Like wholistic medicine, the Chinese medical system emphasizes prevention through proper treatment and lifestyle. The three limbs of Chinese medicine include acupuncture, herbalism and bodywork or massage therapy. All three are rooted in the concept of an energy system which is as complex as the nervous and vas-

cular systems but invisible to the naked eye, much as we cannot see atomic energy or electrical energy but we certainly can see its effects. The energy model unifies and explains the other principles of wholistic health care, explaining the need for a mindbody concept. Currently the leading researchers in nuclear physics are providing a very profound message and one that the Chinese gave over five thousand years ago - that there is no material universe. There is only energy, or movement; only vibration. Man is a microcosm of that universe - the same energies that exist in the world exist in man and move in complex energy pathways that can be manipulated and controlled. Disease is the result of disruptions in those energy pathways which underlie the physical form. Modalities such as acupuncture, herbalism and massage can help to bring the body back to energetic balance and thwart the progress of disease or help prevent its onset. These modalities are very helpful for women who desire to avoid the surgical-chemical route and are also helpful for women who opt for the traditional western route of chemotherapy and radiation. They can help ameliorate pain as well as the side effects of chemotherapy and radiation treatment, supporting the body and helping it to remain strong through such treatments. These treatments can help provide quality of life and in some cases, extend the life and help prevent recurrence of the disease. Health professionals in all these fields will vary in their skills and training and their experience in treating cancer patients. The patient must be responsible and investigate a variety of practitioners, checking to see that the practitioner is licensed in their state and certified by a national organization such as the American Massage Therapy Association, the American Organization of Bodywork Therapies of Asia or The National Commission for the Certification of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine.

Since Wholism sees the most profound power of health and healing to be inherent in the mindbody, the mind must be addressed as well as the body. There have been many studies pointing to the negative effects of stress on the system. Psychological stresses often cause a disruption of the energy system and disruptions in the flow of the energy system result in disease. Therefore it is imperative that women learn to constructively deal with their emotions which may be causes or contributing factors towards their disease and learn to deal with the stresses imposed by their condition in a positive psychological framework. For many this may entail enlisting the help of a clinical psychologist or a support group. Many studies show that patients who have strong social support groups live longer than patients who do not. Meditation is also essential for providing peace of mind and a positive atti-

tude of healing. In Taoism it is said that "idea precedes manifestation". Being determined to heal oneself can help make it a reality for that person. In addition, the spiritual component should not be ignored.

In our combined experience of over forty years of treating clients with cancer we have seen what works and what doesn't. Wholistic approaches to breast cancer work. They emphasize changes in lifestyle, education and overall patient responsibility. When clients recognize that they are ultimately responsible for their own health and well-being, that they must take an active role and work in cooperation with a professional, they achieve the best results. It is best if they can enlist a team of professionals working together on their behalf. More and more physicians are recognizing the value in interacting with wholistic health practitioners for the benefit of their patients, having seen the results that wholistic modalities can offer. There are many different programs and treatments available to cancer patients - some are valid and some are not. The patient must investigate, read, utilize the Internet, and make an informed choice. At the same time they should be making changes in their daily habits, in their eating and exercising and in a complementary treatment schedule. The potential of wholistic health care is actualized only when an individual refuses to abdicate responsibility for her health and moves from being a passive recipient to becoming an active participant in health development.