

FOREWORD

Infinite Possibilities

From the perspective of curative and preventive therapy, we have lost the war on cancer. Deaths from cancer are increasing. In 2008, there were 565,000 deaths in the United States alone. One in three people will get cancer in their lifetime. And few people know that solid tumors grow slowly for thirty years before they can be detected. We now have 17 million Americans walking around with cancer somewhere along the continuum from initiation of a cancer cell to detectable tumor.

In the “war” on cancer, we are fighting a losing battle for one simple reason: we are focusing on the wrong target. As a physician, I was trained to focus on the tumor: to burn, poison, or cut it out and then wait, watch, and pray for the cancer to stay at bay.

The problem with cancer is not the tumor, however, but the *garden* in which the tumor grows. In caring for a garden, if the weeds get too big, we pull them out—just as we do with cancer using conventional therapies. But then what? *Embrace, Release, Heal* is about the “then what.” It’s about the inexplicable, spontaneous remissions, cures of the incurable, about pioneering researchers, doctors, and patients exploring the edges of possibility and bumping up against a fertile science of how to tend our gardens.

The future of cancer care lies in the thinking and exploration found in this book. It provides a doorway of hope and possibility that rests in learning how to tend your own garden. The science supports this. But medical practice lags behind.

Traditionally, we have focused on late-stage curative care, and in doing so, we have missed the thinking and the treatments focused on changing the underlying conditions that led to the cancer in the first place. Diet, lifestyle, thoughts, and environmental toxins all interact with our genes to change the landscape — or garden — of our health. We have been asking the wrong question about cancer. We have asked “what”: What tumor do you have? What kind of chemotherapy, surgery, or radiation is needed for that tumor? What is your prognosis? Rather, we need to be asking “why” and “how”: Why did this cancer grow? How can you change the conditions that feed and support cancer-cell growth? How did your garden become a host to such an invasive weed?

Surprisingly, scientific literature is abundant with evidence that diet, exercise, thoughts, feelings, and environmental toxins all influence the initiation, growth, and progression of cancer. If a nutrient-poor diet full of sugar, lack of exercise, chronic stress, persistent pollutants, and heavy metals can cause cancer, could it be that a nutrient-dense, plant-based diet; physical activity; changing thoughts and reactions to stress; and detoxification might treat the garden in which cancer grows? Treat the soil, not the plant. It is a foundational principle of sustainable agriculture, and of sustainable health.

In my oncology rotation in medical school, I asked my professor what percentage of cancer was

related to diet. Expecting a gracious but insignificant nod to the role of diet as a cause of cancer, I was surprised when he said that 70 percent of all cancers were related to diet. The 2010 report from the President's Cancer Panel found that we have grossly underestimated the link between environmental toxins, plastics, and chemicals and cancer risk.¹ They have yet to acknowledge how thoughts, emotions, and overall stress impact that risk, but that acknowledgment is sure to come. The facts that gravitate around cancer support evidence that will motivate us all to take a deeper look.

Consider this fact: 16 percent of all cancers are new, primary cancers in patients who have had cancer, not recurrences. This means that people who have cancer are more likely to get a second and independent cancer. Could it be the garden? I recently saw a patient after her third cancer, wondering what she could do to prevent cancer rather than waiting around for another one.

Consider this fact: the lifetime risk of breast cancer for those with the "breast cancer gene," or BRCA1 or 2, is presently 82 percent and increasing every year. Before 1940, the risk of getting cancer for those with the cancer gene was 24 percent. What changed? Our diet, lifestyle, and environment—both physically and emotionally. Might these factors be a better place to look for answers to how to address our cancer epidemic?

Cancers arise from a disturbance in your physiological state. Addressing that disturbance is the foundation of future cancer care. This approach might be called milieu therapy. Rather than treating cancer per se, we treat the milieu in which cancer arises. And this is manageable: we can enhance immune function and surveillance through dietary and lifestyle changes, nutrient or phytonutrient therapies. We can facilitate our body's own detoxification system to promote the elimination of carcinogenic compounds. We can improve hormone metabolism and reduce the carcinogenic effects of too much insulin from our high-sugar and refined-carbohydrate diet, and help the detoxification of toxic estrogens through the modulation of diet and lifestyle and the elimination of hormone-disrupting xenobiotics or petrochemicals. We can alter how our genes are expressed by changing the inputs that control that expression—diet, nutrients, phytonutrients, toxins, stress, and other sources of inflammation. And we can focus on less divisive and more generative thoughts that, in turn, create more uplifting emotions—all good fertilizer for the soil in the garden of our body.

The future of cancer care must use medicine's understanding of the mechanisms of disease, as well as physiologic and metabolic balance, to design treatments that support and enhance normal physiology. The future of cancer care lies not in finding the best cocktail of chemotherapeutic agents, the right dose of radiation, or a new surgical technique, but in finding the right way to personalize treatment according to the individual imbalances in each person. This book contains the stories of the people—doctors and patients—who have paved the way. The pieces of the puzzle that hold the answers for cancer prevention and treatment are strewn about the landscape of medical science. They need only be assembled into a story that can guide clinical care. The time is ripe to accelerate this process. And this book begins the telling of the story of how to tend the gardens of our body, mind, and soul.

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