

Introduction



WHEN THE NEWS THAT I HAD CANCER EVENTUALLY penetrated my being in the doctor's office, I felt very shaky. Caught off guard, I was surprised at how vulnerable I had suddenly become. Nothing—not my competence as a health practitioner, nor knowledge of cancer, nor experiencing the personal pain of an intimate friend's struggle to beat "it" during the previous two years—nothing—prepared me to face the verdict of cancer in my own body.

Pressured to make a quick decision about treatment, I felt as if I was being sucked into a big machine and onto a conveyor belt. My doctor seemed to know exactly what I should do before I even had a chance to get my bearings. Weighed down by these demands and decisions, I took time to walk, to meditate, and then share my news with a very few close friends.

I realized I faced three challenges: I needed to ask for support from others, to find a way to bring clarity and order into this fearful, confusing experience and to tap into my own intuitive understanding. Along the way, as I acted in accordance with these awareneses, I discovered precious gifts in addition to those offered by my health practitioners.

In asking for what I wanted from others, my heart opened to the generosity of friends; I found that good organization lessened my scattered energy; and in listening to myself, I began to allow a new balance to come into my life.

AFTER SHOCK: From Cancer Diagnosis to Healing evolved out of my attempts to create a container and structure that would support my journey. From my first fledgling notes grew this tool to assist you in organizing your cancer experience, especially during the first crucial year. If you are facing an unwelcome recurrence, I hope you too will find this book helpful and encouraging. Its purpose is not to give detailed medical information or advice. I call on my personal and professional experience and training to offer practical suggestions and guidelines to help you clarify your own process, perspectives and choices. Woven throughout are stories shared by friends and fellow travelers as well as my own.

REACH OUT

With the discovery of cancer, it's really helpful to ask for support from trusted friends and family. It's advisable to find out as much as you can about your type of cancer from sources such as your local library, cancer resource organizations and the Internet. Your life will shift, as mine did, to include an all-absorbing round of medical visits. As you search for the best possible professional care, you'll probably meet with your primary physician, surgeon and oncologist. Next come tests and treatment, waiting for and receiving results. Perhaps you'll get a second or third opinion, or seek out a complementary practitioner. You will make decision after decision about your treatment and deal with all sorts of medical records, financial statements, bills and insurance plans. At times such tasks may seem endless.

GET ORGANIZED

Disorganization is definitely hazardous to your health! I quickly discovered that good record keeping was essential if I were to avoid ending up under a mountain of paperwork. I was amazed at how quickly papers accumulated—personal jottings of conversations or dreams, medical prescriptions,



exam results, bills and so on. In the early days I just lumped everything together and I dissipated precious energy by scrambling around to find a crucial piece of information from a pile of haphazard notes. Sorting things out is in fact a way of controlling this “runaway train.” It will save lots of time and contribute to your sanity.

REACH IN

In the midst of all this hard work, I felt pulled in another direction. While first and foremost I wanted to heal my physical body, I knew that more than my body was out of balance. I'd been neglecting some of my own advice for a healthy life. I had to reach inwards to find a centered place where I could create my own prescription for healing. Friends were vital, but I felt challenged to come to terms with my inner fears and questions such as “Why me?” “Who will take care of me?” and a host of “What if this, or what if that, happens?” It wasn't easy. Yet doing so led me to choose activities that nourished my mind, emotions and spirit as well as my body and had a profoundly beneficial effect. I thought of myself as being on a pilgrimage—a sacred journey towards healing and wholeness.

OVER TO YOU

There was a time when cancer was generally understood to be a death sentence. That is no longer true. Your active participation is key to healing. Use this practical handbook as a tool. Adapt its many suggestions to your needs and temperament, as you make decisions, follow through on treatments, organize it all in your own loose-leaf binder or notebooks and create your wellness program.

Take heart, we are now among almost 10 million living Americans who are cancer survivors.