

# CREATING HEALING FOR CANCER PATIENTS

Dr. Neil McKinney, BSc, ND

Dr. McKinney will be presenting his lecture entitled, "Creating Healing Conditions for Cancer" at Health Fusion 2009, Saturday, June 6, 2009 from 11:00 am–12:30 pm. For program details visit [www.cand.ca](http://www.cand.ca).

Naturopathic medicine has at its core a belief in the ability of the body, mind and spirit to heal by its own innate wisdom and organization – *vis medicatrix naturae*. By application of medicines and techniques derived from, and in harmony with Nature, we can correct imbalances to create conditions which support this self-healing.

Cancer injures a person at many levels. There is always an emotional component, from the fright and trauma getting a diagnosis, to the strains it can place on one's social network. Cancer's metabolic poisoning can produce wasting, pain, weakness, malnutrition and myriad indignities. The sheer mechanical pressures of tumors crowding organs and vessels can be a misery, and worse. Even when the cancer cannot be cured, naturopathic healing can be successful in providing much needed care and comfort to the patient.

Medical oncology contributes many skills to the care of these malignant pathologies. Not the least of their contributions is in tumor de-bulking. All medical therapies used in the treatment of cancer have risks, none work all of the time and not all patients are fit to receive potentially curative care. There is clearly a need to improve on the therapies that are currently considered the medical standard of care. What little progress that is seen in cancer care by conventional medical oncology is coming at an unsustainable price.

Naturopathic oncology supports medical therapies<sup>a</sup>, augmenting them with its own unique medical skills in mind-body healing, nutritional support, detoxification, homeopathy, botanical medicine, and nature cure. Our gentle medicines and healing arts have the potential to improve outcomes, while moderating iatrogenic impact.

Naturopathic doctors can improve the patient's fitness for rigorous cancer therapy by application of basic naturopathic treatments. For example,

in my practice, a number of women whose multi-gated acquisition scan (MUGA) of ventricular function showed their hearts were being severely injured by the breast cancer drug Herceptin. These women were returned to therapy after a short course of tinctures of *Convallaria* and *Crataegus* with a homeopathic kicker of *Naja* 6C. One patient whose heart was not well enough to even start on Herceptin was made fit, and stayed fit throughout the course of Herceptin therapy by this simple medicine. Since HER2/neu-targeted therapy is essential to success in cases which are HER2 positive, this integration of botanical medicine may have saved lives.

NDs can prepare a patient for surgery and help them heal. We review supplements and natural medicines for possible interactions with anaesthesia or blood clotting. We emphasize vitamins A and C, and the mineral zinc in the diet for wound healing and immune support. We remove dietary salt, which impairs wound healing. We offer homeopathics<sup>2</sup> such as *Engystol*, *Arnica*, *Hypericum* or *Staphysagria* for immune support, and healing of wounds and nerve or emotional trauma. We can offer nutraceuticals such as fractionated citrus powder<sup>3</sup> to reduce the risk of the spread of cancer, particularly important in abdominal and pelvic surgery.

We can make radiation therapy more tolerable and at the same time more effective.<sup>4</sup> Radiation disrupts tissue organization by removing vital immune and stem cells. We can protect this vital link in healing and help maintain tissue long term, by use of vitamin A,<sup>5</sup> as well as curcumin<sup>6,7</sup> and *Ashwagandha*,<sup>8</sup> herbs from Ayurvedic and traditional Chinese medicine systems. Curcumin deserves special mention, as it is so useful in many phases of cancer care and is moving closer to becoming a mainstream oncology drug, largely based on the work by

Aggarwal's group at MD Anderson in Houston. It cools the fire of inflammation,<sup>9</sup> including that from ionizing and photon radiation, while actually increasing the effectiveness of the therapy. We must never use any oil-based product on the skin during radiation therapy, as lipid peroxidation reactions can have devastating consequences. However, simple *Aloe vera* gel, rosehip and green tea extracts can soothe radiation burns. We can protect blood vessel endothelium from chronic sclerosis with omega 3 oils, vitamin A, grapeseed extract and the niacinamide form of vitamin B3. This slows the gradual loss of tissue integrity and healing ability that inevitably follows radiation.

We can assist greatly in making cytotoxic chemotherapy less damaging, and more likely to result in a remission of the cancer.<sup>10</sup> This is a field for which a surprising volume of scientific evidence exists, yet it is discouraged by pharmacists looking for a level of proof equal to patent pharmaceutical drugs. Excellent safety data and good evidence of efficacy in humans does exist for many naturopathic medicines. There may be few really large scale randomized controlled trials, but there is no ethical barrier to applying the best available evidence. We can point to a recent Cochrane review which tells oncologists that mistletoe therapy helps both radiation and chemotherapy work better with less side-effects.<sup>11</sup> We can add the clinical experience of over 80 years use of mistletoe extracts in cancer, including the 2 out of 3 medical doctors in Germany who currently prescribe it during these therapies.<sup>12</sup> Many other natural supports have good evidence of positive interactions with chemo drugs.<sup>13</sup> We can give Co-enzyme Q-10 to mitigate cardiac damage by the anthracycline chemo drugs such as Doxorubicin.<sup>14</sup> We can also rely on years of accumulated clinical experience among the American Board of Naturopathic Oncologists (ABNO) and their Canadian peers, naturopathic physicians with practices focused in oncology, members of the Oncology Association of Naturopathic Physicians.

We can also contribute to the care of many side-effects of surgery, radiation<sup>15</sup> and chemotherapy<sup>16</sup>. For those few who do not tolerate or benefit from the standard nausea drugs, we can offer ginger root, protein supplements,<sup>17</sup> acupuncture,<sup>18</sup> and homeopathic remedies such as *Tabacum*, *Arsenicum*, *Cuprum* or *Nux*. We can treat lymphedema with the "herbal simple" *Calendula officinalis* – topical and internal use of the marigold flower. We can treat mucositis with that gem from old Nature Cure, green cabbage extract. Metabolic cachexia responds to

omega 3 marine oils rich in eicosapentanoic acid<sup>19</sup>, melatonin<sup>20</sup>, and *Codonopsis* herb. When people fall through the cracks in the hospitals and oncology clinics, we can help most of them.

The most critical support NDs can offer is to help the patient's immune system to survive the ravages of these medical therapies. Most people seem to have the idea that the immune system has killer cells which remove cancer cells, so if a person has cancer, their immune system must be weak. We all seem aware that the immune system can actually remove cancers and create the legendary "spontaneous remissions"<sup>21</sup> – but rarely does so. However, *the immune system's mandate is to protect and repair our own tissues, and attack everything else*. Cancer cells are just sick cells, crowded and stressed, and this summons immune cells bent on repairing the tumor. However, the immune system cannot fix the genetic damage in the cancer cells, and the cancer cells won't switch themselves off as they should, so it becomes "the wound that will not heal". The immune cells increase blood supply, release growth factors, and even switch off immune cells that approach the tumor in attack mode. The immune system is in fact quite healthy in most cancer patients, it's just working for the tumor and not for the greater good of the organism.<sup>22-23</sup>

Naturopathic medicine can modulate the immune system with a variety of techniques, from ancient to modern. Hydro-therapy, both local and constitutional, has demonstrable effects on immune integrity. Detoxification can be the key to improving function in organs and immune tissues, not the least of which is the bone marrow. We can draw a link between heavy metals and pesticides and the blood cancers such as lymphoma, multiple myeloma and the leukemias. We can also link toxins such as endocrine disruptors to hormone-dependent cancers such as breast and prostate.<sup>24</sup> We use "forces of nature" such as far-infrared saunas for detox, as it is excellent for mobilizing and excreting solvents and chemical poisons, while directly increasing immune cell competence. We can apply very traditional bowel cleansing, including colonic irrigation in some cases. We have many wonderful foods plants and which modulate the immune system, such as astragalus,<sup>25</sup> ligusticum,<sup>26</sup> plant sterols & sterolins, larch arabinogalactans, alkylglycerols from shark liver oil, and traditional glandulars- spleen and thymus peptide extracts. Hot water extracts of the Asian mushrooms maitake, shiitake, reishi, agaricus and cordyceps are established oncology drugs in Japan. Most notable as an immune therapy for cancer

is the anthroposophical medicine *Iscador* injectable mistletoe lectin extracts,<sup>27</sup> and related mistletoe products *Helixor* or *Viscum Compositum*.

Hormonal, targeted and immunological allopathic therapies can also benefit from naturopathic support. For example, Tamoxifen helps suppress reoccurrence of breast cancer, but the Italians have shown it is far more effective when melatonin is taken concurrently. Even as a stand-alone therapy, melatonin may double life expectancy.<sup>28</sup> This is wonderful from a drug with over 30 years safe use and which costs pennies a day. Therapy with interleukin two (IL-2) can be supported with PSK mushroom extract.

Naturopathic physicians identify key growth factors, epigenetics and biochemical issues for specific forms and stages of cancer, to create targeted natural therapies.<sup>29</sup> For example we can squelch insulin-like growth factor one (IGF-1) with green tea<sup>30</sup> and grapeseed extracts, while prescribing a low-glycemic diet.<sup>31</sup> This would be useful in breast, prostate and GI tract cancers. We can find natural inhibitors of aromatase,<sup>32</sup> nuclear factor kappa B, COX-2, transcription factor STAT-3, epidermal growth factor, to name but a few. We also can easily demonstrate proteosomal regulators, and promoters of cell re-differentiation and of apoptosis. We have developed protocols for mitochondrial rescue,<sup>33</sup> reversing the Warburg effect.<sup>34</sup> There are not yet pharmaceutical drugs that do many of these important tasks, and it unlikely any of them to be developed will ever be able to claim they are food-grade. The cost-effectiveness of these natural medicines is extraordinary in relation to drug medicine.

Naturopathy is full of great medicines for serious medical complications and oncology issues. Boswellia extracts can have profound effects on brain tumors, reducing peritumoral edema<sup>35</sup> responsible for seizures, paralysis and other neurological symptoms. This can reduce or even eliminate the need for Dexamethasone, which can do much harm if used for very long. All cancers increase the risk of blood clots, from 3 to 30 times normal, depending on the type of cancer.<sup>36</sup> We can respond with nattokinase, bromelain, omega 3 marine oils, *Ginkgo biloba* and *Aesculus* or horse chestnut. Pleural effusions often benefit from homeopathics such as *Apocyanum canadensis* and *Apis mellifica*. Liver failure, at a stage that MDs have never before seen cured has been by corrected rapidly by a milk thistle extract<sup>37</sup> with dandelion, globe artichoke, curcumin and R+ alpha lipoic acid. Kidney failure has been averted by R+ alpha lipoic acid, Co-enzyme Q10, quercitin and delta tocopherols.

We are always cognizant that as physicians, our first duty is to do what is in the best interest of the patient, which includes being vigilant for medical emergencies where our allopathic colleagues are best consulted.

Healing the mind of fear and hopelessness is a triumph, even when physical cure is not possible. So often, it is the healing at the mental and emotional level which truly restores biological balance and takes a person out of disease and into real health and function. Improving self-expression through art and music, and restoring “zest for life” as Lawrence LeShan puts it, is a potent force for healing. Through interpersonal connection, spirituality, as well as practices of devotion and gratitude, patients can experience grace, peace, and restoration.<sup>38</sup> Medical oncology can be very grim and discouraging for sensitive patients. A discouraged, hopeless patient will not seek pure water, clean food,<sup>39</sup> and wholesome physical activity that are the keys to health.<sup>40</sup> Hope is a potent force for rallying the innate healing mechanisms such as the immune system, and enabling lifestyle changes necessary for healing. It is hard to understand how such a basic element of the caring relationship has been lost in conventional medicine.

Every naturopathic doctor has the skills to prescribe lifestyle changes such as improved diet and exercise, which are proven to impact cancer survival and quality of life. We can nurture the individual who presents with a cancer problem. The traditional Chinese medical term for this is *Fu Zheng Pai Beng*, which means support and nourish the patient to fight the disease. We can adjust treatment to their constitution. We can try to prevent harm, and act to heal when injury occurs from medical interventions. We can prolong remissions, increase the rate of cures, and yes, sometimes even cure cancer naturally.<sup>41</sup> The vast majority of cancer patients are looking for and using complementary and alternative medicines. We are the profession that must be integrated into cancer care to make oncology rational and complete.

### **About the Author**

#### **Dr. Neil McKinney, BSc, ND**

Born in Vancouver, BC, 1952. Graduated in Biosciences from Simon Fraser University in 1975. Worked several years in cancer research in the field of radiation biophysics. Attended the University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Kinesiology and Health Studies and the Ontario College of Naturopathic Medicine in 1981. Graduated from National College of Naturopathic Medicine in 1985. Concurrently did three years at the Oregon College of Oriental

Medicine. Practiced about 16 years in Vernon, BC. Moved to Victoria in 2001 and shifted practice focus to oncology. Member of the Oncology Association of Naturopathic Physicians. Served many years on College Boards, was Registrar of CNPBC for five years, an evaluator for CNME, and had many other roles as inspector, mediator and leader. Dr. McKinney has had many teaching roles, from lab instructor in microbiology at UVic and NCNM, at schools of traditional Chinese medicine, massage therapy, and finally as a professor at BINM. A founder of the BC Naturopathic Association and the Boucher Institute of Naturopathic Medicine. Author of many publications, including: *Naturally There's Hope - A Handbook for the Naturopathic Care of Cancer Patients* and *Naturally There's Always Hope – Healing Cancer with Natural Medicine*. Dr. McKinney is well known for his generous sharing of time and writings to mentor students and peers. He has received a number of awards for contributions to advancing the scope and standards of the naturopathic profession.

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