

Mood in Cancer

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This essay is based on my clinical observations and readings. I am not a trained psychoanalyst, nor M.D. I am a shiatsu practitioner who works with cancer patients in a medical center.

Shiatsu diagnosis does not separate the emotional condition from the physical manifestations. Correct shiatsu diagnosis can give great insights to unspoken feelings and moods that the recipient is experiencing. It has been shown that shiatsu treatment can decrease sympathetic nervous response when it is predominant, promoting a state of rest, and can help alleviate symptoms which are both of the body and of the mind.

The following is an overview of the myriad emotions that can significantly affect cancer patients to their detriment:

The emotional effects of finding out one has cancer are as varying as the individuals who go through it. Some go to their doctor because they feel unwell, and are sent for various tests, [which can be extremely unpleasant], before their condition is confirmed. Some find out that they have cancer during a routine checkup. It could be that breast cancer is viewed in an annual mammography, or suspicious signs spotted while having an examination, for insurance purposes, for example, or a new job position, leading to further investigations. Naturally there will be shock and fear at receiving this news.

Depression often accompanies feeling physically unwell.

Physical conditions can chemically affect the mental state.

One could lose confidence in one's abilities, or feel isolated when her health prevent her from participating in intimate or social activities.

Some, with a sense of hopelessness, already dread "the worse", as maybe they'd already seen a relative suffer through illness.

In nearly all cases, the patient will need to adjust to a new reality. She is ill and will need to go through many medical procedures during the diagnosis and the treatments, or have to come to terms with the ending of her life.

Her life is changed. The lives of her close ones are changed.

She may be seeing her body as a traitor, no longer to be trusted.

In the western world, following the diagnosis of cancer, usually there will be medical procedures. Tests, more tests, operations, medications, radiations and more tests.

Researches have shown improved prognosis and better quality of life when the patient is given a sense of choice and participates with the physician, agreeing to the medical interventions. But the decisions are far from easy. The doctors themselves may disagree about the diagnosis or the treatments. There may be pressure applied by family members. Relatives and friends, if she is open about her "new condition", will usually offer much advice. And, the market is never short of miracles, potions, and cure peddlers.

Proceeding through the treatments and regimens calls for much determination, patience, and endurance during a period which could be lengthy.

Another aspect of illness is finance. Being ill hinders the ability to work and generate an income. Also, there will be new expenses. The hospital bills, doctor bills and medication can total up to huge amounts. Even though most citizens in this part of the world are backed by government or

private health insurances, those insurances will rarely cover all the costs from sterile pads and special foods to home help.

The financial issue adds to the worry that already exists. For many, the sense of dependency is often accompanied by guilt because of the sacrifices family and friends must make on their behalf.

It is difficult to accept one's body after the mutilating operations, shape-altering chemotherapy, steroids and hormonal therapy, when the body's form and its functions can be so altered.

I've met very few patients who feel the illness is over and done with, even when told they are disease-free. After the treatments, cancer patients have periodic screenings and checkups. Even if they feel well and healthy, and manage to push the experience to the very back of their mind, there will be dates when they are due a checkup. The checkups do get further apart as the patient is clear of signs, but the trauma leaves a mark that's not easily erased.

The cancer patient's life has changed forever. Or, it's the time to come to terms with its nearing end.

With shiatsu these emotions can be recognized and treated, at specific acupressure points, meridian pathways, or with certain forms of touch. Alleviating extreme moods and smoothing the emotions help strengthen the spirits as well as maintaining and enjoying improved physical functions, such as respiration, circulation, digestion and sleep patterns.