

# Thoughts About Using Counseling to Recover from Cancer

*I wrote this article to help some friends who are setting up support networks to help them fight cancer.*

*Chuck Esser*

No one knows why cancer attacks some people and not others. We live in a harsh environment and all of us are exposed to various cancer-causing agents on a daily basis. Some people are exposed to extreme amounts of harsh chemicals, etc. because of their work or where they live. Still our bodies have a tremendous ability to cure themselves of these toxins and budding cancers.

It also seems that particular lifestyles and sets of attitudes about oneself might make one more vulnerable to or make it harder to be victorious over cancer. I have seen these attitudes fall into two categories: (1) self-invalidation, sometimes specifically associated with the area of the body affected by the cancer; (2) a world view as a victim. This can mean such things as always looking for someone else who will fix things, or a resistance posture, fighting injustice to oneself and others but being convinced of defeat inside.

Many people have recovered from cancer, often when doctors have given them minimal chances of survival. There have been many successful methods of recovery, including diet, prayer, envisioning the affected part as whole, healing services, radiation, and chemotherapy. There have also been people who have tried all these methods and not been able to fight off cancer. From what I can tell, the deciding factors in success are to actually make a decision to identify and change one's life from the old chronic distressful ways of functioning. It is necessary to decide that you personally have power to correct the situation competely. No matter how many methods are employed to fight cancer, everyone I have been involved with who has been successful has cried, shook, yawned, and laughed along the way to health.

As with all physical difficulties, our recommendation is to get the best medical help and advice and then to counsel on the distress and feelings surrounding the difficulty.

## Help for the client:

1. Forgive yourself completely. You have not caused the cancer. It is not your fault that you have it. Everything that has happened is over; the future is yours.

2. A first step outside of being a victim to cancer is determination. Finally the enemy is clearly before you. You don't have to hold back. You get to fight all-out, no holds barred.

3. A second step outside of being a victim is relaxed confidence. "That you would try to take me, Death, amuses me."

4. Take an attitude of unreserved self-appreciation in words, tone of voice, posture, particularly of the area in which the cancer is active. "I am a beautiful, whole person."

5. This is your chance to change your life away from any rigid ways you have been conducting it. If you eat lots, eat thoughtfully; if you never ask for help, ask; if you have every minute scheduled, unschedule; if you never do anything frivolous, play, etc. A good contradiction in actions to a chronic distress should allow you to discharge through it quickly.

6. Do not respect your fear of death; discharge it completely. Some attitudes for sessions that might be helpful are: "Even if I die today, my life has been totally worthwhile. I have no regrets." "Death, come take me; pain is my forte" (said in a confident voice).

7. No matter what the prognosis, how much pain, what setbacks there are, none of them are an indication that you have lost.

## Tips and reminders for the counselor:

1. The client's difficulties, pain, despair, and fear are not yours. Your attitude toward your client can be one of relaxed, confident delight.

2. If your client is too terrified to take any of the attitudes suggested above, you can take them for them.

3. You have to be active. Provide the contradiction of reassurance and not being afraid of their fears so that they can discharge. Examples: If the client can only decide to fight but not with confidence, you can be confident. Quote from Kipling, Shogun, Superman, etc. If your client is speedily appreciating themselves but from the angle of "If I do this, it might work," you can slow them down and tell them in detail how much you love them. If your client is always being distracted from their central fight by others' worries, discouraging letters, etc., you can filter out those distractions so they can concentrate.

4. Get sessions for yourself so you can talk about all your worries. We are all filled with them from our society.