

Healing Involves the Body, Mind, and Spirit

When it comes to cancer (or any other serious illness), many people have found that true healing demands more than just showing up for physical treatments at a health care facility. The journey back to health, it can be argued, requires a holistic (or whole-person) approach - one that encompasses body, mind, and spirit. "Body" is the most commonly acknowledged aspect of recovery in our Western society and, in addition to the usual treatments and drugs typically thought of, the "physical" can also include things like good nutrition, exercise, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, dental care, etc., all of which can play a very important role in regaining health.

When it comes to "mind" and "spirit", however, this is often left to luck or chance - unless we actively seek it out for ourselves. Unfortunately, our healthcare system does not typically focus on these aspects of a person's care. Although it can be argued that nourishment of the mind and spirit are outside of the scope of the local health care authorities per se, perhaps they shouldn't be. Indeed, research shows us unequivocally that, when a person does things to quell their mind and nurture their spirit during illness, the healing journey can be hastened.

The good news is that there are within the Canadian health care system some wonderful individuals who recognize that, by acknowledging, honouring, and actively encouraging care of the mind and spirit during a health crisis, they get better results (and much more job satisfaction). Even if this extension of care doesn't always lead to a physical cure, these people know something that not all health care workers do; that is, that healing happens on many levels.

Two such wonderful individuals are Dr. Rob Rutledge, who is a cancer specialist in Halifax and Dr. Timothy Walker, PhD, who is a psychotherapist and mindfulness teacher. This dynamic duo not only work full time at their given professions, but also devote a lot of their spare time to nurturing people who have cancer through weekend workshops they call "Skills for Healing" retreats*. The goal of these retreats is to give people with a cancer diagnosis an opportunity to become familiar with some of the many skills available to help them cope with their diagnosis, with special emphasis on the mind and spirit aspects.

Throughout these weekends, attendees will learn integrated cancer care, how to negotiate the medical system, the scientifically proven healthy lifestyle habits, and stress physiology and relaxation. The skills of mindfulness-based stress reduction, meditation, yoga, Qi Gong, and re-framing difficult thoughts will be taught. Much of the teaching is experiential and involves group discussions. The power of the weekend is from an intense supportive-expressive support group.

Rob and Tim have been running these retreats for ten years and have written a (much recommended) book called *The Healing Circle*. They have also developed a charitable organization called the Healing and Cancer Foundation. Founded in 2007, this foundation has evolved out of their ten-year collaboration, drawing on their clinical

practices and the inspirational learning they have gained in facilitating dozens of weekend cancer retreats. As their website states: “The organization equips cancer patients and family members with a powerful, integrated approach to the cancer journey – helping people to heal at the levels of body, mind and spirit. It draws on the best of medical science, the vast teachings of world spiritual traditions, and the inherent wisdom within each person. At its core is the practice of deep compassion for oneself that expands outward in an engaged connection with others in community”.

It is thanks to individuals like Rob and Tim, who are living examples of compassionate care in motion, that many people can find comfort and solace through, what can undoubtedly be an overwhelming life-stage. Although not everyone - no matter how much love, support, and work that they do after receiving their life-threatening disease diagnosis - will conquer their physical illness - inevitably we are all destined to die one day, there is, however, much to be gained spiritually, when a person can make peace with their life. In doing so, they are often able to face their death with less fear.

*Note: Currently, the education sub-committee of the Tantramar Hospice Palliative Care Organization is planning to host one of Rob and Tim’s Skills for Healing retreats. It is to be held in Sackville, NB., on April 25th, 26th and 27th. Rob and Tim will be coming to share their gifts with anyone who has been given a diagnosis of cancer - it does not matter what stage of treatment or healing they are at. They are also welcome to bring one support person with them. That person can be a loved one, friend, or caregiver. There is no cost for the actual retreat (although a *refundable* deposit is requested). Nutritious snacks and lunches will be provided on the Saturday and Sunday. However, attendees travelling from out of town will need to make their own arrangements for accommodation and supper. Please call Jane or Steve at 506 536-4219 or email sclaxton@mta.ca for more information or to register (space is limited). You can find more information on the websites: www.thpco.ca and: www.healingandcancer.org

Written by Jane Claxton-Oldfield MDN janeclaxtonoldfield@gmail.com If you have any questions regarding the retreat, please email sclaxton@mta.ca