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# News

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\*\*\*\*\*Cancer patients draw pictures to  
"visualize" their diseases and  
treatments.

DALLAS--A kind of "body wisdom" possessed by the patient who is "in touch" with his or her illness can be of immense help to that person as well as to the physician overseeing the case. This is the belief of two Dallas psychologists who work in the area of using "imaging," or imagining the disease process and the treatment procedure to open up communication between the doctor and the patient.

Another goal that may be achieved through imaging is enabling the physician to understand not only the patient's attitudes toward the disease and the treatment, but also the patient's expectations. They also hope to gain more understandings of the role the patient plays in his own treatment. Even more important, they say, is what they may learn about the "struggle for life" itself.

Drs. Jeanne Achterberg and G. Frank Lawlis, a husband-and-wife team of psychologists, have recently published "Imagery of Cancer," a book for professionals. She is an assistant professor in physical medicine and rehabilitation at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas; he is associate professor in psychology at North Texas State University.

"Imagery of Cancer" summarizes the pair's research with 90 cancer patients into imaging, or visualizing their internal disease processes, as well as what was going on in their bodies during treatments. The publication is essentially a tool for others in the health care field to utilize. Besides the work with cancer patients, Achterberg and Lawlis include information, some from other researchers, about visualization for persons with diseases as complicated as diabetes and as simple as the common cold. It also includes work with obese persons.

To begin with, the researchers guide the patients through an individual series of relaxation exercises, first with a therapist in person and then using a tape recording of the therapist's voice. The patient, seen either in a hospital or a clinic, is then instructed to imagine the cancer cells, the working of the immunological system, as represented by white blood cells, and the fighting of the disease by whatever treatment the patient may be receiving. The therapist asks the patient to draw pictures of what he saw happening in his imagination.

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The patient is instructed to view the cancer cell as being an abnormal cell occurring within an organism, "metabolically confused." Most can be overcome by the normal attacking properties of white blood cells.

An interview with the patient about what the "mind pictures" mean follows, giving the therapist even more of an opportunity to understand how the patient feels about the disease, the process and the treatment.

Achterberg said she and Lawlis have found it easier for the attending physician, or in some cases, the therapist, to guide the patient in a positive way to cooperate with the medical regime he or she is under if they are participating in "imaging." Also, the patient is more comfortable being in touch with what is going on, as well as having feelings of participation in the treatment. She stressed that the aim is cooperation with the treatment, not to be confused with a cure for the disease.

The symbols "seen" are individual to each patient, according to Achterberg's book. She points to Carl Jung who wrote that "the place or the medium of realization is neither mind nor matter, but that intermediate realm of subtle reality which can be adequately expressed only by the symbol...neither abstract nor concrete, neither rational nor irrational, neither real nor unreal, it is always both..."

In "Imagery of Cancer," the authors write that the symbolism most commonly relates to a person's own framework of perceived psychological attributes of the disease process. They are derived from "a combination of resources, including memory, dreams and vision." Many of the symbols identified are archetypal figures; many are traditional representations for figures of good and evil.

The authors point out that the symbols which have positive connotation are those representing strength and purity. They are powerful enough to subdue an enemy and "pure enough to so with justification." Among these are frequently knights, including the white knight, and Vikings.

"In fact, I really don't know whether some of these symbols are a part of our Jungian heritage or come from soap commercials," said Achterberg with a laugh.

Other symbols which frequently predict favorable progress are large, powerful animals, especially dogs and bears. "Bad" images which have shown up in the research studies are sometimes mechanical devices, such as vacuum cleaners, shovels or picks. Ants, a particularly bad indicator, have always been a part of women's visualizations, but never men's. Achterberg suggested that perhaps this is because of ants' being traditionally "the housewife's scourge."



The researchers have developed a way of rating a patient's responses on a scale of 0-5 to a series of impressions in the pictures and interviews. These include: vividness, activity and strength of the cancer cells; vividness and activity of the white blood cells; comparison of the number of cancer cells to white blood cells; comparison of the size of the cancer cells to white blood cells; strength of the white blood cells; vividness and effectiveness of the medical treatment (radiation, chemotherapy, surgery or a combination); concreteness versus symbolism in the image; strength of the imagery; and the number of times a day the patient "sees" these images. The therapists then compute the score of the test, called IMAGE-CA.

Two groups of patients were used in the study. The first was a well-educated, highly verbal group of which most were familiar with relaxation exercises, the use of imagery and meditation. Some were physicians, physiologists and various kinds of health professionals.

The second group were patients from the county hospital. Many of these were financially needy, poorly educated and not familiar with the surveillance theory of cancer, the workings of their immunity systems or the popular psychological techniques and concepts related to imaging.

"I'm happy to say this group also did just great," reported Achterberg. They also responded well to the instructions to become physically relaxed and to take an imaginary trip through their bodies.

The researcher has gained reinforcement of the idea that mankind has available a "body wisdom" that patients can call upon. In another research project, which was published in "Multivariate Clinical Experimental Research," she found that while modern laboratory tests give the physician an often frighteningly accurate picture of the extent of a patient's cancer, the "in touch" patient can often predict with a much higher degree of accuracy how the disease will respond to the treatment in the near future.

Another advantage to the use of visualization with patients, said the psychologists, is opening an avenue by which the health personnel can gauge the patient's understanding of what is actually happening in his or her own body. They believe that it is important for the patient to realize not only the inroads being made by the disease but also how the treatment is combating the progress of the cancer.

While imaging may seem esoteric to many, Achterberg reports that she is pleased with the increasing acceptance she is finding among physicians and other scientists at the health science center. Originally joining the faculty to work with a cancer program, she has now broadened her patient contacts to include work with pain, trauma and other diseases. Lawlis also sees patients with spine-related pains sent to him by orthopedic surgeons at the school, who have patients "draw" their pain on an outline of the human body.



third add imaging

"Probably people wouldn't be so surprised by the method if they realized that the use of imagery, which Shakespeare calls 'the stuff dreams are made of,' has a long history," said Achterberg.

"Imagery is at the heart of Freudian analysis. Also, Jung believed that the trip through the unconscious via visual techniques produces a wealth of insight, offering the patient a means of dealing more effectively with life situations." In addition, techniques using imagery were used by Wundt in the first psychological laboratory in 1879.

Today visualization is at the very heart of many kinds of therapy, especially Gestalt, psychosynthesis and counter-conditioning. Biofeedback patients usually report some form of mental imagery that accompanies a change in autonomic function.

And the two believe that every physician uses some form of imagery in communicating with their patients, often seen as the bedside manner. "It is the process involved in building a 'will to live'--transmitting to the patient the expectation to return to health."

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