

To the members of the Cancer Enquiry team,

Please accept this personal testimony of a recent cancer patient. I have been extremely fortunate in the opportunities that have been made available to me, and that I have chosen to take advantage of. This has resulted in a very positive personal health outcome.

My wish is that all people faced with a diagnosis of cancer can be as lucky as I have been. Please read my story and I urge you to take note of the many factors that have helped me to return to full health.

Yours faithfully,

Betsy Bush

14/03/2005

Submission to the Cook Cancer Enquiry

Submitted by:

Betsy Bush

My Cancer Story

I am a 45-year-old mother of 2 daughters (aged 11 and 13). I live in Perth and work part time as a computer analyst for the state government. In January 2004 I was fit, healthy and happy. Then within a few weeks, following biopsy of a small lump in my neck, I was diagnosed with low-grade follicular non-Hodgkins Lymphoma, stage 4 with bone marrow involvement.

Conventional Treatment

I thank my surgeon for referring me to haematologist Dr David Joske at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. With help and advice from Dr Joske I chose to be treated with immunotherapy (Mabthera). However, since Mabthera is not available under the PBS as a first line treatment I first had to undergo 4 months of chemotherapy before I met the criteria to enable me to have immunotherapy. I also chose to be part of a physician-sponsored clinical trial at Fremantle Hospital in which I received radio-immunotherapy ("Hot Mabthera") under Dr Harvey Turner as my 4th and final dose of Mabthera in July 2004.

Meanwhile, life on the home front had to go on. Coping with the discovery that I had cancer was made even more difficult by the fact that my marriage imploded. My children, then 10 and 12 years old struggled to cope with my diagnosis of cancer and my youngest reverted to throwing tantrums like a 2 year old. She was a very scared little girl. Coping with this whilst undergoing chemotherapy was a nightmare, but regular psychotherapy helped me to keep my head above water.

Then there were the medical bills, we have top cover health insurance with MediBank but the gaps that I had to pay left right and centre (especially for the psychotherapy as I soon used up my annual 'allowance') meant that I could not pay my other bills (e.g. car servicing and insurance). In desperation I borrowed money from my parents. There were times when cancer seemed like the least of my worries; a diagnosis of cancer brings with it so many other practical problems and issues.

It's now March 2005, last year was a hell of a year and I have come a long, long way. In October 2004 I was retested and Dr Joske informed me that I am in complete remission. My bone marrow now shows no trace of cancer and all of my tumours; which had been extensive through my neck, armpits and down through my chest and abdomen and groin (and had measured up to 5cm in size), have gone.

I am convinced that my remission is a direct result of everything else that I did in the complimentary and mind-body medicine area that has helped my body to respond to the treatment so well.

So what has made the difference?

- 1) The single most important factor in my healing has been my involvement with the **Gawler Foundation**. I read Ian's book "You Can Conquer Cancer" at an early stage. It gave me the **hope** that I needed. I believed that I could help myself, I just needed some guidance. This guidance came when I attended a weekend workshop with Ian Gawler in Fremantle in May 2004. The workshop put me on track and gave me an introduction to many different perspectives on healing that I could use to compliment the conventional treatment that I was having at the time. Then in August I attended a 10-day program for cancer patients at the Gawler Foundation in Victoria. **This was the most profound experience of my life**. I came away with many practical ways in which I could help heal myself: from meditation to nutrition, positive thinking to spirituality. I regained control of my life and I knew how I could help my body fight my cancer and, crucially, how I could change my life in order to keep cancer away.
- 2) Another major source of help and support has been the **Cancer Support Association of Western Australia**. I attended support group meetings regularly and also other information sessions and seminars. The support of this wonderful dedicated group of people has been a critical factor in my healing. I had many personal issues to deal with and the support, friendship and sharing of experiences with other cancer patients has been invaluable to me. The support group helps to keep me positive and recharges my batteries when I am flagging. **I have advised my GP that when confronted with a patient with a new diagnosis of cancer the most helpful thing he can do is to urge the patient to contact the CSA and find out what they can offer**. Through the Cancer Support Association I found out about Guolin Qigong (a form of walking meditation) and attended a course in May 2004 run by Dr Bisong Guo. I have been practising this form of Qigong; devised for cancer and other chronic illnesses, ever since.

- 3) Initially, following diagnosis it was the **Browne's Support Centre at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital** that opened my eyes to the plethora of complimentary therapies that I could make use of to support the conventional treatment that I was receiving. It also made a huge difference to my perception of going to the hospital – I went there not only for 'pain' but also for pleasure! Through Dr David Joske and the Browne's support centre I was able to use the services of a wonderful counsellor who helped me to address not only my cancer but my personal problems as well. In my ignorance I had assumed that a diagnosis of cancer would automatically involve referral to both an oncologist and a counsellor. I was deeply shocked to find that counselling is not an intrinsic part of 'normal' cancer treatment; it really needs to be.
- 4) Another very important factor has been that I have the extreme good fortune to have a consultant, **Dr David Joske**, who **believes** that I can make a difference to the outcome of my cancer treatment and **supports me** in my endeavours to do so. Having spoken to many other cancer patients I have discovered just how rare these qualities are in a haematologist or oncologist and I realise just how lucky I am.
- 5) Through the **Haematology Care Centre at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital** and my family GP, Dr Grant Russel, I am part of a '**shared-care**' project which means that my GP and specialist (and any other health professional that I visit) are kept aware of any treatment or other medical issues that need to be brought to the attention of the other(s). Practically, this has been an important part of my care as it provides lines of communication between relevant medical practitioners and relieves me, as a patient, of the burden of having to remember all the relevant medical information when I visit the clinic or surgery. It has also been important for me to feel that they are all part of one 'team' treating me.
- 6) My daughters have attended play therapy workshops run by the **Leukaemia Foundation**. This helped them address their fears associated with having a parent with cancer. The services that the foundation provides are a huge support for families in my situation.
- 7) My husband and I had counselling with **Relationships Australia**. We have also had family counselling sessions that have helped us to deal with my cancer within the family. Again this is another organisation that has helped me so much and that provides a wonderful service to the community.
- 8) My manager and Human Resources staff at the **Department of Industry and Resources** are very supportive and understanding of my situation. Their help in supporting me through this last year has been tremendous. It has allowed me to focus on my health issues without the burden of becoming stressed about work commitments. They have helped me to manage my sick leave and have changed my work duties to suit my needs.

- 9) Lastly, and most importantly, the love, support and practical help from my **friends and relations** both in my local community and around the world has been terrific. For example, parents from my daughter's school (**Rosalie Primary school** in Shenton Park) made up a roster of 30 - 40 families and 4 nights a week an evening meal was brought to our door throughout the year. Our school community, both teachers and parents is particularly strong and I am the 3rd parent in my daughter's class to have had cancer and received this wonderful gift of 'meals on wheels'.

Where to now?

14 months following diagnosis of cancer I am a different person. I am happy and healthy and fit, although not without a few remaining challenges. I am separating from my husband this month, but it will be an amicable separation. Through the help I have received, especially from the Gawler Foundation, I have learnt to let go of the hurt and resentment I held towards him and have learnt to forgive.

My specialist's aim through treatment was to achieve as long a remission for me as possible. My lymphoma is termed 'incurable' by the western medical profession and is given a prognosis of roughly 15 years from diagnosis; with frequent recurrences of the cancer during that time. But what I have learnt over the last year has enabled me to interpret 'incurable' as '**incurable by conventional medicine alone**'. **I know that I can heal myself** and am determined not to give cancer a second chance. My medical specialists can help me but there is only one person who can keep cancer at bay for good and that is myself and I have the knowledge and tools to do so.

I am meditating, and I am eating a healthy diet. I have a very positive outlook on life and I am very excited about my future. I have deep gratitude to all those who have helped me on this journey over the past year.

How you can help

Please help other people diagnosed with cancer to regain **hope** and to achieve a similar healthy outcome. I urge you to consider the following:

- Government funding and support for the Gawler Foundation
- Support for research into Integrated Medicine by direct support of Gawler Foundation Research and of wider research projects in this field.
- Encouragement and support of training of health professionals in Integrated Medicine
- Increased public access to the range of choices of complimentary therapy, and information regarding the validity of those choices.

Betsy Bush
14th March, 2005