

Guiding a child Through holistic Healing

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Children have a strong and natural instinct to survive. Unlike adults, this instinct is uncontaminated by negative thoughts which can often undermine it, and precipitate a feeling of impending doom. Their view of the world, whilst simplistic, touches on the very emotions and spirituality that as adults many of us have cleverly learnt to suppress or ignore. This gives tremendous scope for holistic therapy, since children do not possess the skepticism necessary to undermine its effects. Their intuitive ability is receptive to the natural healing which promotes an overall sense of well-being in mind, body and spirit.

Children rely on their 'senses' to gauge what is appropriate for them; they can sense when something is wrong and likewise when something feels good. If a form of treatment is too painful it conflicts with what they understand to be 'healing' or 'getting better'. This conflict is clearly present in conventional cancer treatment, where pain and suffering is associated with 'healing' - totally puzzling for any child.

Natural therapy, by contrast, seems less intrusive. Not only is it

consistent with the idea of healing, since no pain and suffering is involved, but it permits the child to be treated within his own comfort zone. This means that children do not necessarily have to be treated in hospital, but can remain in the security of their own home. Also, important aspects of healing such as food and nourishment, are familiar to the child. Other techniques involving touch, such as gentle massage, reflexology and reiki - can be soothing and quite acceptable to a child whose familiarization with touch goes back to birth. Herbal preparations are no more intrusive

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than pharmaceutical drugs when taken orally. Homoeopathic remedies are in fact palatable and sweet-tasting. When incorporated into the child's life in the formative years, healing can become an integral part of everyday life, such as in the case of my son Daniel.

Daniel was four years of age at

the time of his diagnosis with the cancer known as 'undifferentiated sarcoma' - a small cell sarcoma that gives no clues as to its origins and exhibits a number of features inconsistent with any one specific cancer. The tumor had appeared quite suddenly as a large mass on his left inner thigh. Within a week, whilst undergoing tests, the tumor grew considerably, to the extent that Daniel was walking on the tips of his toes with his leg arched outwardly to allow for the mass that had spread to an area extending from the hip to his knee.

Our oncologist told us that this type of cancer was aggressive and fast-growing, and it was therefore necessary for Daniel to undergo a course of chemotherapy, followed by surgery and possibly radiotherapy. His prognosis was poor, as we were led to believe that there was no proven cure, even though there were survivors with amputations reported overseas.

The thought of Daniel having chemotherapy, let alone radical surgery, was anxiety provoking for me, especially since there appeared to be no guarantee that his life would be saved. The risks associated with these conventional treatments meant that Daniel's quality of life would be jeopardised. This was something that I was not prepared to do for the sake of medical experimentation. I feared that my son would soon succumb to the cancer and die. I was worried that the pain and suffering associated

with conventional cancer treatment, where prolonging life is more important than quality of life, would suppress Daniel's will to live, and precipitate pre-mature death.

I did not want chemotherapy for Daniel, but felt helpless in a situation where little or no support existed to enable me to exercise my 'right to choose'. I had raised my two young children on natural therapies since they were babies, and it was obvious to me that conventional medicine did not have all the answers. I knew how devastating the effects of chemotherapy were on any person, let alone on a small, young child.

Unfortunately, my husband and I had different views about the treatment. I wanted to try alternative therapies, while my husband felt we should accept the expert conventional medical advice we had been given. In the end, we started Daniel on naturopathic treatment just days before he began a course of chemotherapy. Daniel suffered only two and a half months of chemotherapy, after which time my husband finally agreed to discontinue this treatment. Daniel's tumor had shrunk rapidly, and my husband realized that the reduction may have been a result of the naturopathic treatment. I noted the oncologist's surprised reaction to the immediate reduction of the tumor, as he had originally predicted that it would take about three weeks for signs of change to appear.

I should say that the oncologist had been horrified by our decision to stop the chemotherapy, and had warned us that we were placing our child's life at serious risk. The rapid reduction of the tumor came as a complete surprise to him as he had expected the reverse to happen. After the discontinuation of chemotherapy, follow-up scans demonstrated that Daniel's remaining lump was progressively diminishing without any medical intervention.

The tumor continued to shrink for several months after which point, it

ceased reducing leaving behind what is known as scar tissue, as predicted. The oncologist recommended that the scar tissue be removed, due to the possibility of residual cancer cells remaining. However, my



Daniel Maqueda, aged 5, recovered from cancer largely through natural therapies

husband felt uncomfortable with this suggestion, and sought the advice of our naturopath. Several other doctors we consulted said that the scar tissue could possibly take years to dissolve. But this prediction, like the earlier one, proved incorrect - Daniel's scar tissue dissolved within a matter of weeks after a course of homoeopathy and oral vitamin E. A follow-up ultrasound showed that both legs were identical and bore no trace of cancer ever having been present.

The uniqueness of Daniel's recovery is worth serious attention, in view of

the fact that he had minimal medical intervention and no surgery or radiotherapy. Conventional cancer treatment was never completed to any significant extent. Yet, despite the hospital's inability to explain

Daniel's recovery, doctors still chose to believe that the short course of chemotherapy wiped out the cancer. By contrast, I believe that much of Daniel's recovery is owed to the holistic approach.

In retrospect, had we followed the oncologist's recommendation, my son would possibly have lost the use of his leg and would have been severely disfigured - if he had survived the treatment. While neither natural therapies nor conventional cancer treatments can provide any guarantees, we do know that a patient's quality of life can be improved through natural therapies. Both approaches theoretically stand some chance of curing cancer patients, but there is one important difference; Conventional cancer treatment unfortunately, presents many serious side-effects and can be potentially fatal, whereas holistic treatment has no harmful effects when directed professionally and responsibly.

It is inconceivable to me that chemotherapy - a highly toxic form of drug therapy, and radiotherapy - the very thing that is known to cause some cancers - can be justified in the name of medical science when more humane alternatives exist.

In my opinion, any form of treatment that must resort to highly poisonous substances in order to save life (in some cases, only a small percentage of patients), should be seriously questioned. In view of the harmful side-effects of conventional cancer treatment, more serious consideration should be given to seeking alternatives that can be proven to be just as effective. Of course, for this to happen there needs to be a change in community

attitudes, especially amongst the extremely influential medical profession. Moreover, research needs to be more open to new concepts in health, and funded by independent bodies, rather than the pharmaceutical companies. Since natural therapies represent a broad range of different therapies, one should not be too quick to generalize and judge all natural therapies as hoaxes. Not all natural therapies may be effective individually in treating cancer; but they may be effective when used together, or holistically.

In holistic therapy, health becomes the focal point and not the disease. 'Disease' is only a symptom of the body's general malfunctioning and, therefore, 'disease' needs to be approached from the perspective of correcting the general mechanism responsible for overall health. An approach towards 'health and not 'disease' is obviously more conducive to a positive mental approach, which natural therapists see as a necessary and integral part of the healing process.

'Complementary medicine' is the term that is now often used to refer to alternative/natural therapies. Admittedly, I have difficulty with the use of this term, since 'complementary' implies that the two concepts work in coordination with one another. When examining the effects of conventional cancer treatment, one can see how the latter works as the antithesis to natural therapy, and in many respects against it. This is particularly true of chemotherapy - it destroys the immune system, the very thing that natural therapy aims to correct. The use of anesthetics, the effects of surgery, and radiotherapy also deplete the immune system. All this makes it harder for the body to fight the cancer. Further complications occur because the body is then faced with having to fight the added stress of toxins produced by the treatment itself. Theoretically then, the two concepts are not complementary. However I believe that natural therapies can help to reduce some of the serious side-effects of conventional treatment, and therefore enhance the quality of life.

Furthermore, the sterile, cold, and

impersonal environment in the hospital is not geared towards healing. Sickness is overwhelmingly present and inescapable for those who are confined in hospital. This is not conducive to healing.

When my son's tumor was shrinking, I was discouraged from measuring his leg because this was perceived as raising 'false hopes'.



Daniel at 5 years old.

This seemed ludicrous, since 'hope' seemed better than 'no hope'. Retaining a positive attitude was very important to me and my son. My husband and I always made a point of feeling excited when we measured Daniel's leg and found it had decreased in size. This was very encouraging for Daniel, and an incentive for him to participate even more in his recovery. In the light of what Daniel was going through with chemotherapy - nausea, chronic fatigue, loss of hair, proneness to infection, weight loss, etc. - natural therapy became a preferable option

since it was less traumatic and worked more consistently with the idea of 'health' not 'sickness'. The discomfort caused by distasteful herbal remedies was insignificant in comparison to the trauma associated with conventional cancer treatment.

In retrospect, the brief course of chemotherapy perhaps helped Daniel realize his options. From the point of view of a four-year-old boy, conventional treatment could never make any sense. He would have to ask himself, "Why do I feel so sick if this treatment is supposed to make me feel better?" This is very confusing to a child. A child needs to make sense of the world around him; you cannot convince a child that he will get better when the treatment itself induces illness. The object of conventional cancer treatment and its effects are totally inconsistent with the idea of 'healing'. By contrast, natural therapy provided Daniel with an unambiguous and positive treatment therapy, not thwarted with pain and suffering.

Children, I believe, have a far greater capacity to heal than adults, and can respond to natural therapies more positively. Their thoughts are not contaminated with skepticism and 'what ifs' (provided care-givers do not project this, of course).

The care-givers play a crucial role in holistic healing. The trusting and caring relationship existing between the child and care giver is unique and can never be duplicated in a doctor-patient relationship. This is a significant part of the healing process, since it relies on the child responding positively to treatment. Who could a child place more trust and confidence in, but his mother and father? Believing in what you are doing is as important as the treatment itself.

The holistic approach I used meant that a whole range of different skills and

resources had come into play. These included diet restrictions, vitamin! mineral supplements, herbal remedies, homoeopathy, compresses, blue light therapy, relaxation and visualization, sleep talk therapy, gently massage, and crystal meditation. All of these aspects, I found, performed a special function in the overall process of healing. They should not be treated independently from one another, but rather as part of an integral whole - since otherwise this would be denying the complex and intricate nature of the healing process. Perhaps this explains why holistic treatment is considered 'unscientific', since current methodology is incapable, and maybe in some respects even irrelevant, in measuring the complex phenomenon of mind-body medicine.

I now reflect on the hard and worthwhile efforts we all went through, and realize the importance of my role. In the case of my son, I felt it was my responsibility to investigate options I believed were in his best interests. We must remember that we all have a right of choice and having once made that decision, a commitment to the therapy has to follow. This, I believe, is crucial, because without commitment, the therapy is undermined. Often, parents would express amazement at Daniel's responsive attitude towards natural therapy. I should admit that it wasn't at all times easy winning his cooperation, and, in fact, there were times when it was difficult to have him take certain remedies that were distasteful. Lack of support meant there were times when I was physically unable to follow all procedures, since I also had a two year old child. I cannot profess to having done everything to perfection and according to plan. However I did my very best within existing limitations. There were times when I felt guilty - caught between what I should be doing and what the child was prepared to give.

It is important that treatment not become a source of stress for the child, therefore outweighing the potential benefits of the therapy itself. Patience, understanding, and perseverance are essential, since one cannot expect a child to change suddenly and adopt new habits and lifestyle (especially if many of those are foreign to him). Whilst some



Daniel visits Santa at the age of 4.

changes may be readily accepted, others may take a while for the child to adapt to, and therefore may need to be introduced gradually.

Experimenting with different food combinations and approaches may be necessary. However, should the child violently reject a particular food remedy, it is a good idea to leave it for a day or two and then try again. Sometimes offering a reduced quantity of a particular food is more acceptable than placing a large serving in front of the child. Over time, one will find that the child will learn to appreciate certain foods. For instance, both my sons now drink vegetable juices quite happily. It is helpful for the child if the entire family is able to participate in the changes - vegetable juice could become a family drink, and other diet restrictions may be adopted by the whole family. Relaxation may also be something that all family members join in. This approach is helpful, because it does not single

out the sick child, but places the onus of health on the entire family. This assists in reinforcing 'health' and not 'disease', since the child then views himself as a normal member of the family, and this contributes to his mental well-being.

There are no fixed rules as to how one should go about getting one's child to cooperate. The pertinent matter is understanding your child's personality and nature. Every child is different and responds differently to each situation. The age of the child will, of course, also influence one's approach. With an older child, for instance, it may be necessary to give your child more control over what is happening to him. Discussing and reasoning through the issues may help to diffuse some anxiety and help him understand his options more clearly. In the case of a younger child like mine, game playing was a very typical way of getting him to participate in the natural therapy. Daniel's wheatgrass drink we referred to as 'Popeye's spinach drink',

and very often we would act out the characters. Similarly, other distasteful concoctions were associated with imaginary characters and heroes with which he could identify. Distracting Daniel through play was a very common technique I used to get him to take certain foods.

Sometimes, I would place three or four straws in a cup, so that if he decided to refuse any more he would have drunk three or four times more than he would have with one straw. Fancy straws and cups are often appealing and can serve as a distraction from the taste. Opaque cups with straws piercing through lids can be a wonderful idea for those who are easily influenced by colour and smell.

Choosing the right time is also vital. Often it is better to offer the least tasteful remedies when they are in their best mood, and not when tired, exhausted or even depressed. Generally I would rather offer

Daniel his paw paw leaf tea (a very bitter drink) when it was time to 'jump on Daddy'. He became so excited about having a wrestle with Dad that the drink became a non-issue. It is very important to acknowledge cooperation, and put a reward system in place that serves as an incentive. This does not have to involve toys, or even monetary gain, but may be an activity that the child finds personally gratifying.

Crystals are said to produce specific vibrations that are beneficial in the healing process. The scientific aspect was not so important, perhaps, as Daniel's belief that the crystal would help him get better. Along with relaxation, I would help Daniel express what he wanted the crystal to do. I found this to be a useful tool to help Daniel make positive affirmations, which in turn were used in 'sleep talk therapy' to help promote health. Sleep talk therapy appeals to the sub-conscious mind, and helps reinforce messages and change behaviors. I found this therapy helpful in reinforcing good eating habits and instilling more confidence in Daniel.

I also used relaxation music and gentle massage to help promote quality sleep and healing from within, since touch is a way of projecting love which in itself I believe is healing.

During the initial stages we visualised the tumour shrivelling up into a dried prune. We also used visualisation to help combat the side-effects of chemotherapy, imagining that the white cells were knights in shining armour ready to do combat with the black knights (that is, the cancer cells). When taking his remedies, I often reminded Daniel that we needed to keep his white army good and strong. Children have a vivid imagination, and therefore the use of visualisation can serve as a useful tool in the healing process.

I have made a special point to use the term 'process', since I believe healing is a continuing process and not simply a means to an end. A scan that demonstrates that all is clear does not mean that therapy comes to a sudden halt. We should be conscious of the fact that cancer works in mysterious ways, and that

the risk of relapse lurks and the back of every patient's and caregiver's mind. A healthy lifestyle should be a lifetime commitment since our health is our most precious asset, which money or possessions can never replace. Accordingly one should try to impress upon every child the importance of a healthy body. Children can be taught to understand that health is not just about 'absence of illness', but is influenced by attitudes and lifestyle. Early familiarization with alternative therapies ensures an awareness of health care options.

It seems to me that a coordinated medical system would need to be open to different concepts of health care if it is to work effectively. Whilst conventional medicine has an important part to play in our society, it does not however have all the answers. Rather than being critical of natural therapists, medical professionals should try and work as a team in striving for the common goal of health.

This lack of cooperation is obvious in the area of conventional cancer treatment, where doctors continue to show disdain towards natural therapists, despite their effective results. Considering Daniel had survived a rare type of cancer, one would have to conclude that any professionally responsible doctor would have at least inquired into, or documented the natural therapies that were applied. I ask myself, "Is such an approach not in breach of the Hippocratic Oath?"

It has now been four years since Daniel's initial diagnosis of cancer. One could say that Daniel, now eight years of age, has developed into a strong, healthy boy, participating in karate and many sports at school. His life experience with cancer and remarkable recovery has been an inspiration to many other children who have suffered cancer. This is important since 'hope' is all we can hold onto when little else is offered. For Daniel, 'natural medicine' was a way of restoring hope, which had been shattered by a medical profession.

Shortly after Daniel's recovery he completed a children's reiki

course delivered by Usui Reiki Centre. He was encouraged to practice this whenever he might have felt unwell or emotionally upset. This is important since we need to encourage children as well as adults to take 'responsibility' for their own wellbeing and to help them understand that they perform a key role in the 'healing process' - that 'true healing' comes from within and not necessarily from 'without'.

Daniel is now 20 years of age, fit and healthy, and enjoys a range of physical sports, which he would have most likely not been able to do, had we proceeded with surgery.

I would like to acknowledge the help and guidance I received by several natural therapists, particularly Walter Last, naturopath, biochemist and nutritionist; Roy Charitra, naturopath, acupuncturist, homeopath and traditional Chinese masseur; and Alan Anderson, natural therapist.

The Cancer and Natural Therapy Foundation of Australia was formed as a result of my personal experience with Daniel, which demonstrated that there was a need for people like myself who required access to support and information.

The Foundation's main objective is to provide support, and access to information and resources to people interested in natural therapies and for those who wish to incorporate these into conventional cancer treatment.