

Healing – Not Just Up to the Doctors  
By Zakariaz Gerhard

There are framed paintings on the walls, potted plants decorating the hallways, and green recliners arranged in the corners of the rooms. In the center of the main lounge sits a round water fountain, creating a soothing sound. The wallpaper sets a calm tone for the room, in which few persons sit, reading magazines, newspapers, and books.

Allen reclines in a chair and places on the table beside him a book, titled “Beating Cancer with Nutrition,” as the nurse ties a tourniquet around his arm. She has a pin on her coat that says “Don’t Worry.” We sit in the chemotherapy infusion center at Danbury Hospital where Allen, age 46, has spent some of his time fighting cancer.

“In May of last year, I was identified with a tumor,” Allen recalls. “You know, just devastating. I wrote wills,” he says. “The family was real worried too, but I don’t think they showed they were scared. They have been very supportive.” Allen had a tumor in his colon and the cancer had spread to his liver. It was stage 4; the highest stage cancer can get to.

Allen feels lucky to have come this far; over half of all patients diagnosed with colon cancer in 2005 did not live to tell the tale. His tumors have been surgically removed and he is undergoing chemotherapy to kill off the rest of the cancer in his system. He spent the entire summer of 2005 in a hospital bed because of complications, and despite these troubles, he has a very positive outlook on the life ahead of him, even if the next few days are going to be rough because of the chemo.

Complications from his first surgery left him sick and unable to receive any cancer treatment for months while he was recovering. There was a leak where the

surgeons had reconnected his intestines and bile had leaked into his abdomen. “Made me throw up green stuff like the little girl in *The Exorcist*,” he says.

It was during his stay at the hospital recovering from this complication that introduced him to the holistic nurse and alternate methods of easing pain, treating, and living with cancer. “Through some of the holistic teachings in the hospital, this whole nutrition thing I believe very strongly that it will beef up my immune system so it will do what it’s supposed to do,” he explains, pointing towards the book to his left. A conscious effort on eating well is a major change he has made. He recalls back when he used to live on coffee and cigarettes for breakfast, which he says to himself “was kind of stupid.”

Before he was diagnosed with cancer, he worked 8 to 10 hour days in information technology, sitting at a desk writing programs and dealing with projects. “Not very active,” he says of himself, “and I went out to eat a lot. I enjoyed food.” He was never concerned about his diet before his diagnosis in May. “I thought it was a joke,” he says. His lifestyle has already changed because of his experiences, and once the treatments are complete, he plans to make this change permanent. “I’m going to try to do the right thing as far as nutrition and exercise.”

Although holistic and other alternate methods for curing cancer do not have any solid scientific evidence, clinical trials have shown patients who meditate to have lower stress symptoms and helped reduce anxiety, lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, reduce pain, and increase the quality of life. Certain foods have also been shown to help treat and prevent cancer, although current research is not sufficient to make this a fact.

Allen’s attitude was not always positive. He went to a doctor after feeling incredibly tired and they discovered he was anemic, which led to the discovery of the

cancerous tumor. “During that time, I thought life sucked. I didn’t have the energy to do anything, you know, all work and no play. I couldn’t even drive my car or my motorcycle,” he says. With the shocking news of cancer, and the complications that followed, he felt more frustrated and pissed off than anything else, but he cannot recall when this changed. “It was just sometime in the hospital, talking with the holistic nurses,” he says. A picture of Allen taken just weeks before his diagnosis shows him sitting in a chair and looking extremely drained; there is no light in his eyes and his facial expression depicts one who has not slept in days. However, today, after his three major surgeries to remove tumors in his colon and his liver, he smiles, laughs, makes jokes, and is genuinely excited to have a new beginning, a second chance to do things right.

He says, “the whole concept is to visualize your healing, meditation, relaxation, breathing exercises, and through that whole concept you need a positive attitude, otherwise you mind as well go across the street there and dig your own hole.”