

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Elizabeth Edwards changing the face of a cancer diagnosis Living with cancer as a chronic disease

EVANSTON, IL - Elizabeth Edwards, wife of Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards just announced that the breast cancer she battled in 2004 has returned, and spread to her bones. Doctors say it cannot be cured; however, it can be treated. This is consistent with a growing consensus among medical scientists that people can live in peaceful coexistence with cancer for years, and even decades.

This concept – that cancer does not have to be cured in order for someone to live a full life – is one that Keith I. Block, MD, co-founder and Medical Director of the Block Center for Integrative Cancer Treatment (BCICT), has embraced since the 1980s.

"A new understanding has evolved in the treatment of cancer, one that emphasizes reestablishing health, instead of only focusing on cure," Dr. Block explains, noting that once cancer is controlled, a homeostasis with the disease can potentially be established.

"Few, if any, cancer treatments can eliminate every single cancer cell," Dr. Block says. "Surviving cells may quietly hide in tissue for many years. By keeping your immune resources strong, it may be possible to prolong the time these cancer cells stay inactive. While not a cure, it does stall recurrence or progression as long as you maintain strong cancer-fighting resources."

To do this the immune system must be in top shape. The best time to boost the immune system, Dr. Block says, is right after the cancer (tumor) has been debulked (significantly reduced) through the use of surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy or other strategies.

By eliminating much of the cancer, the immune system can be directed to capture and eliminate remaining cancer cells, which then improves ones chances of overcoming malignancy, he says. Dr. Block adds that viewing cancer as a chronic condition instead of an acute one, with an all or nothing approach, can be profound and liberating for many patients.

At Block Center, cancer patients are evaluated to determine the parts of their immune systems that are weakened by their disease, rebuild those components, and then target the areas most capable of hitting cancer where it counts natural killer (NK) cells, which identify and destroy cancer cells; macrophages, which can selectively kill cancer cells, including those that manage to survive chemotherapy; and dendritic cells, which scan the body for foreign substances and the debris of dying cells, and pick up tumor signals or antigens. Dendritic cells then help activate both NK cells and the T cell system, comprised of T-helpers, T-suppressors, and T-killers, which act together to zero in on cancer cells.

"With proper support from your diet and lifestyle through whole foods rich in phytochemicals, antioxidants, and omega-3 fats, along with a personally tailored fitness program, NK cells and macrophages may help remove cells left over after surgery," he explains. This is where we have directed a great deal of our research. For each specific type of cancer, we have identified distinct agents that enhance the functioning of these immune cells so that they work in the best possible way to help patients overcome the cancer and realize a life-long remission.

In 2004, Green Bay resident Diane Klenke, 46, was prompted by persistent stomach distress to visit her doctor. Suspecting simply an intestinal virus, she was surprised when her doctor minced no words to pronounce she had Stage 4 pancreatic cancer that had metastasized to her liver, and the only advice he offered was “go home and get your affairs in order, you might have three months to live.”

A week later, her fate was sealed when other cancer specialists confirmed the earlier diagnosis and then pronounced her cancer "inoperable."

"They said my type of tumor didn't typically respond well to chemotherapy, but they would 'try and find some type of treatment.' They offered to consult with my doctor back in Green Bay regarding a chemotherapy regimen, but I didn't feel they would offer me the kind of support I knew I would need to beat this disease," Diane says.

Extensive research brought Diane to Block Center and she says she knew right away she had found the doctors and philosophy of care she'd been looking for.

“It is not unreasonable to approach your cancer like you might approach any other chronic illness. We don't necessarily have to cure it for you to live with it,” says Dr. Block. “In Diane's case, it was reasonable to expect that an integrative program and the implementation of an appropriate chemotherapy protocol, we could improve her quality of life, her overall survivorship, and potentially slow her progression, possibly even reverse the disease.

“A series of tests identified Diane's 'molecular fingerprint,' and she began a regimen of supplements tailored to her individual biological and medical needs. Her diet was completely modified, and soon after, and under strict guidance, Diane started an aerobic fitness plan, and later added yoga and Qi Gong, rebuilding her muscle strength and endurance. She began participating in mind/spirit work, and soon after began her chemotherapy treatments.”

After 6 months of treatment, Diane's scans showed a 20% reduction of the tumors. At that time, the administration of Diane's chemotherapy was changed to chronomodulated chemotherapy (or chronotherapy). The chronotherapy pump, an FDA-approved device small enough to fit in a fanny pack, was programmed to her specific regimen.

In December 2004, just two months after starting her chronotherapy treatment, Diane's liver scans showed no evidence of disease. In October 2005, after a year on chronotherapy, Diane's liver scans remained clean, and the pancreatic tumor had shrunk by well over 60%. At that time, Diane was taken off of her chemotherapy. Follow-up tests showed the mass in her pancreas continuing to shrink and no evidence of disease in her liver. Her most recent scans continue to report good news.

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The Block Center for Integrative Cancer Treatment, located in Evanston, Illinois, was founded in 1980 by Penny and Keith Block, MD. The Center's research-based treatment integrates an innovative approach to the best of conventional medicine with scientifically sound complementary therapies – therapeutic nutrition, botanical and phytonutrient supplementation, prescriptive exercise, and systematic mind-body strategies – to enhance the recovery process.

Dr. Block is Director of Integrative Medical Education at the College of Medicine at the University of Illinois, Chicago, and a member of the National Cancer Institute's PDQ Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) Editorial Board in Bethesda, MD. The Block Center regularly participates in industry-sponsored clinical trials of new drugs, large-scale drug monitoring studies, and research on medical communication and patient perception. The Center's research staff has participated in laboratory and clinical research projects with investigators from a number of universities and clinical centers, including the University of Illinois at Chicago, Bar-Ilan University in Israel, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, and the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. The Block Center is currently the only private North American medical center using chronomodulated chemotherapy.

