

Living WITH, Not Dying From, Cancer - Treating Cancer as a Chronic Disease Can Help Prolong Survival

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CHICAGO--(BUSINESS WIRE)--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.

"In other words, you can harness your immune defenses to help improve your odds of staying cancer-free, particularly after successfully putting your cancer in remission."

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. (www.blockmd.com)
