

Cancer

The Diabolical Demon Within

Text by Dr Wong Sin Hee

Editor Dr Tan Yia Swam's note:

Dr Wong has sent in a very heartfelt and personal article on his view of cancer. He shares his observations on the link between emotional and/or spiritual health, and the physical ailment known as cancer. While there is no strong scientific evidence for these, there is a small body of work associating emotions to biomarkers and health statuses. We will have to wait and see how science catches up with these anecdotal cases. I would also define "demon" here as "something insidious or harmful", rather than the religious/mythical creature of evil. For those of us who rely on science to manage cancers, this is a reminder that we should also take into account the overall well-being of the patient – emotionally and spiritually, not just physically – and perhaps incorporate this into our daily practice (eg, referring to psychologists and/or psychiatrists; gently suggesting for stronger family or religious support as per the patient's faith).

In 2016 alone, six of my very close buddies passed on – each struck down mercilessly by the ravaging cancer which had consumed them totally, rendering them defenceless and hapless. There are among us, courageous and inspiring cancer survivors, as well as languishing cancer-stricken patients – many of whom are just waiting for the final curtain to fall.

There is already much research into cancer, so I won't go into the purely scientific explanation of this *demon* – this all-consuming evil that has caused so much pain, suffering and misery to so many people, many of whom were apparently in "perfect" health.

A game of roulette?

Is cancer purely a roulette game of chance that strikes anyone with sheer abandon? Or is it a diabolical evil and a devious demon lurking in all of us, waiting for a chance to gain control and devour us?

Or is it a form of punishment for us? Neither I nor my fellow professionals have the answer.

I was talking to a breast cancer survivor and she told me in hushed tones that she believed that the cause of her cancer was the emotional baggage she had carried all her life – the anger, depression, unresolved conflicts, unforgiving hurt, irreconcilable guilt, and her revengeful and vindictive behaviours. She confessed that all these chronic emotional feelings lingered on until she was struck down by cancer! Her mentor (and saviour) came to her rescue and guided her on letting go of the emotional baggage she harboured. She was taught how to release all her anger and guilt, and to seek forgiveness and acceptance. She was convinced that her mentor has saved her life.

After a successful surgery and a course of chemotherapy, she now lives a very peaceful and reclusive

life, spending her time in quiet prayer and meditation. It has been ten years since her diagnosis. She is now emotionally “cleansed” with no hang-ups. No torments and no worries. And best of all, no cancer.

Emotional stress and trauma – a cause of cancer?

Wars, natural disasters, the loss of a loved one, domestic abuse, financial destitution, emotional upheavals, emotional guilt, irreconcilable conflicts, a cancer diagnosis, tragic childhood events – these and so many more situations can cause the “bottom to fall out” of our lives. They can also leave us with medically diagnosable psychological disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder. However, the relationship between such life events and cancer is weak.

All of us have had some form of emotional traumas in our life, but not all of us have developed cancer. Personally, I believe it is not the traumas themselves that lead to cancer, but that unresolved negative emotions from the traumatic event, and the way one handles emotional stress or trauma might be the precipitating trigger. If, as a result of an emotional event, one becomes an emotional bully, cheat, aggressor and/or self-centred liar, cancer might grow like a creeper in you. I believe that the more emotional guilt one has, the higher the chances that cancer will develop.

There are several ways chronic emotional stress can lead to cancer: activation of inflammatory responses; inhibition of immune responses; inhibition of programmed cancer cell death or apoptosis; reduction in the cytotoxic function of natural killer cells; inhibition of DNA repair; stimulation of cancer cell blood vessels growth or angiogenesis; or the activation of epithelial-mesenchymal transition which can lead to cancer. All these have been reported and demonstrated. (*Editor’s note: Studies have showed altered immunological responses in humans under stress, but are not able to show direct causal relation to cancer, yet.*)^{1,2}

From anecdotal observations, I would say it takes around two

years for cancer to appear when one has such emotional traumatic guilt and unwholesomeness. There is a tendency to internalise intense emotional reconciliation and emotional conflict which results in a drastic change in the personality: “Cancer Personality Profile” is the result. Sometimes, you look at a person and you can spot diagnose cancer! “He looks so worried and so anguished – and cachectic.” The intense emotional upheaval shows.

Preventive and therapeutic measures

I have read about some preventive and therapeutic modes of healing. Meditation and visualisation techniques to heal traumatic and guilty emotions have been suggested. Healing deep emotional wounds with hypnosis therapy is another modality of therapy. Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), or Meridian Tapping, have also been advocated to free the emotionally trapped person. Exercise can prevent and possibly even cure cancer!

Exercise should be done mindfully though. Some incorporate prayers and meditation into their exercise regime. Some even chant a mantra while they are out taking a slow walk in the park. Exercising also helps you to detach from the stressful physical world. In other words, you learn to let go of, detach from and release your emotional guilt or pain. You give yourself some space and some privacy to heal the emotional wounds within you. Look inwards and seek peace and reconciliation.

Another way to alleviate any emotional guilt or stress is to accept, repent and redeem in your own way. It can be done through your religious belief or any other forms of spiritual practice. Cast away your guilt or trouble and let God settle it for you. Yes, pray, repent and seek forgiveness. Forgiveness is a very potent tool – it is self-healing and it heals others too. It removes anger and hatred – the two powerful toxins that will trigger the cancerous process. This will also release you from the emotional bondage that is stifling you.

Do all these *before* cancer strikes! The key word is **prevention!** If you

have suffered an emotional guilt, do not be afraid to admit, repent, redeem and seek forgiveness. Release yourself from any form of emotional stifling that will trigger the cancerous process.

What are emotional guilt and stifling?

What is emotional guilt? It can be something personal – an irreconcilable relationship that becomes a chronic thorn and a daily stressor; an unwise or an unethical financial transaction that keeps haunting you; or a sinful religious transgression committed for selfish and self-centred reasons. Any form of unwholesome behaviour that keeps haunting and plaguing you with guilt could trigger the events that will lead to cancer formation. So know yourself and see where your emotions are driving you.

The choice is yours. Control your emotions. Avoid anger and fury. Display loving kindness, compassion and magnanimity. Repent, redeem and seek forgiveness. Detach, let go and free yourself from any form of emotional guilt and hurt. Do not let your mind be a storehouse of toxins. And keep the “demon” out of your life... Good luck! ♦

References

1. Segerstrom SC, Miller GE. Psychological stress and the human immune system: a meta-analytic study of 30 years of inquiry. *Psychol Bull* 2004; 130(4):601-30.
2. Salleh MR. Life event, stress and illness. *Malays J Med Sci* 2008; 15(4):9-18.

Dr Wong Sin Hee is a family physician doing sessional work for clinics and medical groups.

