

ADRIAMYCIN AND A GOOD BOOK

Having received a diagnosis of cancer from my doctor, I was immediately confronted with a whirlwind of specialist's visits and tests and treatments. I was keen to obtain some books about the disease – both to consolidate the doctors' information, to provide a point of continued reference, and to offer some reassuring backup. The doctors and nurses provided lots of medical information, but very little about spiritual and emotional issues, and other peripheral aspects. Fortunately my treatment progressed slowly enough to allow me time to go looking for information. The internet, like the medical staff, was helpful with reinforcing medical facts. But it lacked the comfort and ready access of a good book.

Finding the appropriate books was fraught with problems. I had just three friends who were fellow sufferers or survivors and were able to recommend some good titles. My counsellors knew about books on how to counsel, but none suitable for a sufferer. In the bookshops some of the books were dated or had too much mundane text. I couldn't concentrate for very long at any one time, so books with short chapters and illustrations were the most inviting. When I stretched out on the carpet in a local Christian bookshop to skim-read the cancer books on the lowest shelf, I was surprised to find that some books had such gloomy overtones. A book with a touch of humour guaranteed an uplifting boost. Even more difficult was trying to find children's books that would help me talk to my grandchildren. These proved to be nearly as scarce as the proverbial hen's teeth. Secular stores were the best bet, but the topic was hard to find – hidden amongst a myriad of titles on food, or farting.

Becoming well informed was empowering. It helped when discussing options with medical staff, when talking with relatives and friends who were somewhat uneasy, and when the treatment became difficult. It allayed many of my fears. Research also indicates that a positive attitude assists recovery.

I've learned that just as there are many types of cancer, there is even more diversity in peoples' reactions to treatment - physically, emotionally and spiritually. White House press secretary Tony Snow describes his colon cancer as a blessing in an unexpected package. For me it was a spiritually enriching time – one of the most important in my whole life. The minutiae of the daily routine and my usual worries seemed far away. My world became quite enclosed, allowing me to concentrate on medical procedures and, more importantly, on God, the source of all life and health. It was great to have visitors to encourage me and remind me of God's healing power. And it was a blessing to have the books that provided the shared experience and wisdom of many other Christians. But best of all were God's reassuring words.

I praise you, Lord, for answering my prayers. You are my strong shield, and I trust you completely. You have helped me, and I will celebrate and thank you in song. Psalm 28:6-7

Here are some cancer resources that I found useful.

Prayer and Devotionals

Angel hugs for cancer patients by LaDonna Meinders. Chalice Press, 2004 hb 85p

Typical devotional format. Beautifully and sensitive treatment of critical issues for cancer sufferers and others.

Funny shape of faith: devotions for the rest of us illustrated by John Bush. Augsburg, 2007 pb 360p

Aged 52, the artist succumbed to non-smoker's lung cancer. His humorous cartoons accompany more than a hundred devotional thoughts about the Bible, faith and Christian living.

Hope for the journey through cancer by Yvonne Ortega. Revell, 2007 pb 160p \$17.95

Sixty uplifting readings that centre on God's messages of compassion and encouragement.

The land of the walking trees: meditations for the seriously ill by Michael Hansen. John Garrett Publishing, 2004 pb 168p \$32.95

Twenty five meditations, each based on a Scripture passage from Luke, are useful for the seriously ill or those with persistent feelings of anger, grief, poverty, etc.

Praying through cancer: set your heart free, a 90-day devotional for women by Susan Sorensen and Laura Geist. W Publishing Group, 2006 hb 190p \$22.95

Two cancer sufferers present meditational thoughts about the various aspects of the disease – all the while reassuring the reader of God's loving care.

The quilt of hope: a warm patchwork of devotional thoughts by Mary Tatem. Barbour Publishing, 2006 pb 190p \$6.95

A collage of uplifting stories (about many types of cancer), all with a quilting motif and information snippet.

A season for hope: daily encouragement for your fight against cancer by Michael S Barry. Cook Communications, 2005 hb 192p \$16.95

The chaplain of a Cancer Treatment Centre has penned 58 hope-filled messages covering the diversity of feelings experienced by cancer patients.

Christian books

The breast cancer care book: a survival guide for patients and loved ones by Sally M Knox. Zondervan, 2004 pb 248p \$22.95

A female doctor lists the questions a breast cancer patient might ask at each stage of treatment. Every chapter has a glossary, Biblical words or reassurance, and suggestions about what loved ones might do.

Claws of fire: seeking the whispering friend by Terry Monagle. John Garratt Publishing, 2006 pb 200p \$35.95

Faced with an inoperable cancer, Monagle talks about "God's intrusion" as he deals with having to let go of his love of life. Spiritual reassurance is ensconced in beautifully written prose and poetry.

Face to face with cancer: comfort and practical advice for sufferers and carers by Marion Stroud. Lion Hudson, 2004 pb 191p \$22.95

A sympathetic look at the various aspects of cancer: its signs and causes, testing and diagnosis, treatments, the hard questions, fear and anxiety, help and healing.

Hope in the face of cancer: a survival guide for the journey you did not choose by Amy Givler. Harvest House, 2003 pb 218p \$17.95

This physician, a 10 year cancer survivor, tackles the emotional aspects of cancer. An orderly analysis and discussion questions in each chapter aim to make the cancer journey a transforming process.

Making the Journey by James J White. Brisbane: Advanced Information Services, 2007 pb 135p \$24.50

A virtual guide for sufferers from a life threatening illness (and their families) – a structured approach to cope with and to enhance everyday living.

A spiritual journey through breast cancer: strength for today, hope for tomorrow by Judy Asti. Northfield Publishing, 2002 pb 160p \$19.95

Diagnosed with breast cancer, Judy Asti had to relearn how to lean on God in all circumstances. She makes many mistakes – a delicious source of humour for the reader.

Whispers from heaven: working your way through grief by Anne Platt. Graphics Above, 2007 pb 174p \$19.95

The author's husband Bob dies of cancer of the spleen after a 15 year battle. She describes how her faith was drastically shaken and eventually became stronger.

Coping with Illness and Grief

Call me if you need anything ... and other things NOT to say: a guide to helping others through tragedy and grief by Cathy Peterson. Chalice Press, 2005 pb 87p \$13.95

There is a lot of practical advice on how not to feel awkward or shy with the seriously ill, how to turn prickly conversations into words of comfort, and how to transform good intentions into real help.

Kids Titles

Cancer by Kristen Lamb. Wayland, 2004 pb 64p \$22.95 [Health Issues series]

Jam-packed with information (and accompanying diagrams and photos) about the common cancers and their symptoms, treatment and prevention.

Through Zoe's eyes: when my mum got sick written and illustrated by Monica Lawson. Brolga Publishing, 2007 pb 32p \$15.95

Zoe's mother battles with an unnamed cancer. Her story deals with the harsh realities as well as their feelings, and the positive and humorous aspects.

When someone you love has cancer: a guide to help kids cope by Alaric Lewis. Abbey Press, 2005 pb 32p \$12.95 [Elf-help Books for Kids]

Single pages of text accompany a heart-warming illustration to form the basis for children to express their fears and misunderstandings.

Where's Mom's hair?: a family's journey through cancer by Debbie, Haydn & Emmett Watters and her kids. Second Story Press, 2005 pb 32p \$18.95

Two boys tell about their mother's cancer treatment – complete with family photos.

Secular books

Breast cancer answers: understanding and fighting breast cancer by Bruce A Feinberg. Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 2005 pb 120p \$36

A doctor provides the finer details of the diagnosis and treatment of Jane, a 37 year old breast cancer patient. Her husband Greg is also included in the process. Excellent diagrams and glossary.

Cancer: 50 essential things to do (revised & updated) by Greg Anderson. Penguin, 1999 pb 184p \$28.95

Some very good advice in a New Age wrapping.

Cancer for two: conquering a cancer together by David Bennett. Michelle Anderson Publishing, 2006 pb 146p \$22.95

A juxtaposition of a husband and wife account of dealing with her colon cancer treatment.

Living simply with cancer (revised 3rd edition) by Ross Taylor. LifeForce International, 2004 pb 90p \$18.95

A melanoma survivor discusses his efforts to adopt a positive approach to healing and a healthy change in lifestyle. Some New Age therapies included.

Men surviving cancer by Barrie Leigh. Jane Curry Publishing, 2007 pb 255p \$29.95

Thirteen Australian men, aged under 50, share the intimate details of how their life changed dramatically when they were diagnosed with cancer. Deals with a variety of cancers.

Medical booklets

(Many of these are free, or available for a small donation. They are usually readily available in waiting rooms and foyers of many cancer hospitals.)

Breast Care Network Australia <http://www.bcna.org.au/>

(My Journey kit is available free to all newly diagnosed breast cancer patients.)

Downloadable booklets: Messages of hope and inspiration, Reducing your risk of lymphoedema, Helping a friend or colleague with breast cancer, Messages of hope and inspiration from women living with advanced breast cancer.

Cancer Councils of various states

Separate books on many aspects of the main types of cancers. Visit their capital city office or look up their website.

Chemmart Can Help health topics: Vital health checks for women, Ovarian cancer. (free)

Try shops of other pharmaceutical chains as well.

Leukaemia Foundation <http://www.leukaemia.org.au/web/>

Information booklets about each of the following topics: Leukaemias, Lymphomas, Melanoma; Myeloid leukaemias; Transplants; Myelodysplastic syndromes. Another valuable online resource: Dictionary of terms. Available in many languages.

National Breast Cancer Centre <http://www.nbcc.org.au/resources/>

Guides and fact sheets deal with early breast cancer, metastatic breast cancer, emotional and social impact of cancer, ovarian and many other types of breast cancer. Information sheets available in various languages.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Secular sites

Blood Counts Information for Kids with Cancer (and anyone else who is interested)

<http://pedspain.nursing.uiowa.edu/BCounts/index.HTM>

At the same site see also A Cast of Cancer Characters - described to help kids and parents understand.

Breast Cancer Network Australia <http://www.bcna.org.au/>

Lots of practical advice and help.

Cancer Backup <http://www.cancerbackup.org.uk/Home>

UK's leading cancer information charity, with over 6,500 pages of up-to-date cancer information. Comprehensive Teen Info section.

Cancer Symptoms <http://www.cancersymptomspace.com/>

Canteen – Living with cancer <http://www.canteen.org.au/default.asp?menuid=18>

Information for 12-24 year-olds

Captain Chemo <http://www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk/captchemo/index.asp>

Comic strips and interactive computer games to help cancer patients worldwide.

Leukaemia Foundation information booklets

<http://www.leukaemia.org.au/web/aboutdiseases/booklets.php>

Several free downloadable booklets about the various types of blood cancers.

My Parents Cancer: when your mum or someone you love has breast cancer

<http://www.myparentscancer.com.au/> Lots of useful information for kids, including a jargon buster

Christian sites

Cancer and the Christian Life by Pastor Kelly Sensenig

<http://www.middletownbiblechurch.org/christia/cancer.htm>

Diagnosed with cancer in 2000, the author struggled to think biblically when facing this disease. Once the chemotherapy was over, another battle ensued – against fear of the cancer returning. Biblical truths helped to put his thinking back on track.

Christian Mirror - Cancer

<http://christianmirror.com/cancer.htm>

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