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**Inspirational Story - February 1, 2009**

## HEALING THE WHOLE PERSON

By Jeremy Geffen, M.D., F.A.C.P.

Anyone who has been through cancer knows that it doesn't *only* affect the physical body. It touches every dimension of a human being. It impacts the mind, heart, and spirit, often as deeply—if not more deeply—than it impacts the physical body.

As an oncologist, I understand that people who are diagnosed with cancer—even at a very early stage—are often shaken to the core of their being. Many seek deeper meaning and understanding of their lives while also searching for comfort and healing.

People with cancer are often told by their doctors: "We're going to give you chemotherapy, but don't take any herbs or other supplements. They may interfere with your treatment." And alternative doctors often say: "We think we can help you, but don't take chemo. It will interfere with our treatment and destroy your immune system." This is a medical Tower of Babel where everyone is speaking a different language. There is a grave failure to communicate, and patients and family members often suffer greatly as a result.

Today people are seeking an approach to medicine and health care—and especially cancer care—that is more holistic and also more sensitive to their needs and concerns as a whole person. This is part of the great wave of change in health care that is being called "integrative medicine."

People of all ages and from all walks of life are searching to find ways of combining various modalities for healing. Most do not wish to abandon standard conventional medical treatments—including surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation—but want to go beyond them to a more holistic approach that includes safe and effective complementary therapies.

There's also a growing industry of alternative cancer therapies. This is very understandable, but it can be risky for many patients—especially if used in lieu of proven conventional treatments. Nonetheless, who could blame someone for wanting to look outside the mainstream if their doctor says, "I'm sorry, but your cancer is incurable"?

### Striking Close to Home

In 1985, when I was in medical school, I personally experienced what the cancer journey is like for patients and their loved ones. My father was diagnosed with a very advanced gastric cancer. It was a shocking and heartbreaking trauma for him, for me, and for our whole family. Because this cancer was so aggressive, the doctors offered my father no hope.

Immediately, I embarked on a wide search to find a cancer center where he could get the best of conventional treatment and the best available complementary therapies. That center didn't exist.

I also searched for an oncologist with excellent medical skills who was also a healer—someone who could look deeply into the mind, heart, and soul of my dad and help him heal at the deepest levels. I could not find that doctor.

After my father died, I felt compelled to become that kind of doctor—an oncologist who was knowledgeable, highly trained, and skilled but who was also open-minded and experienced in the world's other great healing traditions. I vowed that I would also one day build the cancer center that I wished had been there for my dad.

I finished medical school and went on to residency training in internal medicine and

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fellowship training in hematology and oncology. During these six years, I asked hundreds of cancer patients and family members what they had learned about life and healing that could help me become a better doctor. I also traveled to India, Nepal, and Tibet to explore Eastern healing traditions.

One night I woke up in a "eureka" moment and recognized a profound pattern regarding the issues and concerns that patients and loved ones encountered on their journeys through cancer and other illnesses. I saw that all their questions and concerns fell into seven domains of inquiry and exploration.

I began to develop a holistic but scientifically grounded approach to cancer care that coherently addresses the whole person—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. This approach has come to be known as the Seven Levels of Healing®.

In 1994 I opened the Geffen Cancer Center and Research Institute, in Vero Beach, Florida. Over the next ten years, thousands of patients and loved ones experienced a Seven Levels of Healing approach to care that combined top-notch conventional cancer treatments with a wide array of complementary therapies and helped them skillfully address and navigate all dimensions of the healing journey.

Using the The Seven Levels of Healing as a map, people consistently moved from feeling confused and overwhelmed to having a sense of confidence about their lives and their medical care. I directed the cancer center until 2004, when I left clinical practice to bring this message to a broader audience through writing, speaking, and consulting.

### The Seven Levels of Healing

**Level One: Education and Information** provides basic knowledge and information about cancer and the latest treatment options. This empowers patients to actively participate in and obtain the greatest possible benefit from their medical care.

**Level Two: Connection With Others** explores the importance and benefits of finding support and connection with others on the journey through cancer.

**Level Three: The Body as Garden** explores the safe and effective use of complementary therapies and invites patients and family members to regard the body as a sacred, wondrously complex garden, rather than a machine.

**Level Four: Emotional Healing** enters the inner realm of the human heart. It explores the transformative power of releasing fear, pain, and anger—and embraces the healing power of self-love, forgiveness, and acceptance of all parts of one's self.

**Level Five: The Nature of Mind** explores how our entire experience of life—including life with cancer—is profoundly influenced by our thoughts, beliefs, and the meanings we give to events. It also shows how we can consciously escape the tyranny of the mind and move forward on our healing path.

**Level Six: Life Assessment** assists patients and family members to discover the deepest meaning and purpose of their lives and their most important goals. What do we want to accomplish, experience, and share with others?

**Level Seven: The Nature of Spirit** embraces the profoundly healing spiritual dimension of life that we all share and explores the nonphysical dimension of our being that is whole and complete, regardless of our circumstances.

The Seven Levels of Healing apply to all dimensions of life, not just cancer or other illnesses. We each have a physical body that needs and deserves care and attention. And it's a privilege to be able to lovingly care for our physical bodies—to eat well, exercise, receive good medical care when we need it, and experience the wonderful benefits of many different complementary or alternative therapies. But we must never forget that we are multidimensional beings.

My goal now is for people to realize that we are not just our bodies. Each one of us also has a mind, heart, and spirit that need and deserve love and care and

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attention—just as much as the body does. I am passionate about sharing what I've learned with others and helping them know they are not alone.

Dr. Jeremy Geffen, author of *The Journey Through Cancer: Healing and Transforming the Whole Person* (Three Rivers, 2006), is a board-certified medical oncologist and pioneer in the field of integrative medicine and oncology. For more information on his leading-edge programs, visit [www.geffenvisions.com](http://www.geffenvisions.com).

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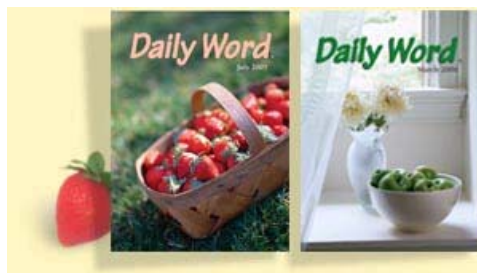
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