

The Wellness Community Approach To Psychosocial Treatment For Cancer

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The Wellness Community's philosophy for the treatment of cancer is a holistic approach to healing, which includes psychosocial as well as biomedical forms of treatment. Perhaps the most prominent feature of the program, though, is the emphasis on patients to take control of their cancer. In "From Victim to Victor," the founder of the Wellness Community, David Benjamin, Ph.D. writes,

"cancer patients who participate in their fight for recovery along with their physicians-instead of acting as hopeless, helpless, passive victims of the illness-will improve the quality of their lives and just may enhance the possibility of their recovery."

The main ideas of the Wellness Community program are consistent with other types of psychosocial treatment programs which have been referred to in the literature as "A Cancer Wellness Doctrine" (Cella, 1990) and "A Wellness Model" (Zimpfer, 1992). Basic similarities among these programs exist in the way of an emphasis on empowering the cancer patient.

As mentioned above, the Wellness Community is intended to function as an addition to, and not a replacement for regular medical treatment. In no way is its purpose

to act as a source for alternative methods of treatment to cancer. In fact, patients are encouraged to continue their medical treatment while taking full advantage of the program. Because the psychosocial realm is the Wellness Community's focus, its staff members never make recommendations for medical treatments.

The Wellness Community provides people with cancer a smorgasbord of psychological resources designed to improve the quality of their lives. These resources are also claimed to enhance cancer patients' chances for recovery. They include opportunities for cancer patients to meet others who are living with cancer and to learn and utilize helpful skills for improving one's psychosocial status through a variety of classes, lectures, and other activities. All components of the program are intended to address at least one of the central issues for psychosocial well-being in cancer patients which are confronted at the Wellness Community: loss of control, helplessness and hopelessness, stress, and loneliness. A reduction in these barriers to happiness is believed to have positive affects on the immune system. Thus, one of the rationales for the existence of this program depends on assumptions originating from the field of psychoneuroimmunology.

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