

Books focus on having positive attitude when very ill

Question: My sister's husband was diagnosed recently as having a malignant growth, the identity of which remains unsolved at the moment. They live in the Washington, D.C., area and have good resources available to them. I feel like a helpless bystander, ignorant of how I can best support my sister and brother-in-law. They have a marvelously positive attitude and have opted for a "humor as medicine" approach to reinforce whatever medical therapies will be advised. Do you have a list of publications you can recommend to me to help sensitize me to my role? Of course, I've already called and talked at length and written letters, and I'm standing by ready to go east if they indicate it's a good idea... but I figure any information that might reduce blinders on my part would be helpful.

Answer: The most well-known book on the role of laughter and positive emotions in coping with serious illness is probably "Anatomy of an

Living with Cancer

Illness as Perceived by the Patient: Reflections on Healing and Regeneration" by Norman Cousins. While Cousins's explanation of how his illness was cured has been challenged, his story has also inspired many people who are coping with serious illness and has pointed the way for improvements in their quality of life. You might also want to read the book "Laugh After Laugh: the Healing Power of Humor" by Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M.D.

A recent book that discusses the controversial role of attitude in healing is "Love, Medicine, and Miracles" by Bernie Siegel. Another book that discusses the role of attitude in dealing with cancer is "The Healing Family: The Simonton Approach for Families Facing Illness" by Stephanie Matthews Simonton. There is also controversy over Si-

mon-ton's approach to treating cancer, specifically, through relaxation and visualization, but this book provides information on adapting to cancer as a family and supporting the patient. A book that sensitively explores the emotional experience of cancer is "And A Time to Live: Toward Emotional Well-Being During the Crisis of Cancer" by Robert Chertman.

"The Road Back to Health: Coping with the Emotional Side of Cancer" by Neil A. Fiore, is an excellent guide for patients and their families through cancer diagnosis, treatment, and emotional consequences.

Knowing his sense of humor and his tastes, you and the rest of the family could put together a basket for your brother-in-law of humor-oriented things to open day by day, such as recordings of his favorite comedians; tapes of radio shows, such as Prairie Home Companion; copies of magazines, such as Games Magazine; books of jokes, cartoons, or funny stories; items from a joke shop; a blank book in which he could write about funny things that happen every day or about funny things that have happened to him in the past; postcards stamped so they are easy to mail, funny photos of friends and family members, or a joke-a-day calendar. You might also want to con-

sult a person has chosen option (1), the good advice in these books should not be overlooked. It may not be in your case a cancer cure, but it can cure you of the assumption, if it's got you, that the only place you should look for a cure is the place where you learned of your cancer, viz, the

medical profession.

What is curious is the internal contradiction between emphasizing your freedom to take charge of your "cure" combined with the assumption that you do not want to be free to decide whether you should pursue "cure." The latter is the materialist-organismic supposition that like other living things, you will fight for your life in this survival-of-the-fittest biocosmos. The medical profession ingrains this dogma: the doctors win as long as your organism continues to function no matter at what "quality" level. Biophilism, this philosophy teaches, is "natural": the alternative is necrophilous, Greek for "death-loving," literally "corpse-loving." Freud's eros/thanatos. God/Devil, as it were.

A further contradiction: true biophilism, "life-loving," loves the biosphere, which your death will relieve.

If two physicians independently say you have cancer, you should (1) fight it, (2) go on about your business and try to forget about it, or (3) lie down and die: I wouldn't know which: that's for you to decide.

tact the Humor Project (Saratoga Institute, 110 Spring St., Saratoga Springs, New York 12866, Joel Goodman, Director, 518-587-8770) for other ideas.

While your sister and your brother-in-law have taken a positive and humorous approach at this time, their outlook may vary over the course of treatment, and your own emotional response to the situation may not always coincide with theirs as a couple or as individuals. People who have cancer and their family members sometimes feel that they must hide their fearful, sad, or angry feelings and this tends to cause problems. If at times you are unable to maintain the positive and humorous approach, don't feel guilty. Honesty on your part may make it easier for others in the family to express their full range of feelings and relieve stress and emotional pain.

You mentioned that your brother-in-law will be using humor to reinforce his medical therapy — not instead of it, and that is very important. Humor and a positive approach can improve the quality of life of your brother-in-law and those concerned with his illness while he is under medical treatment, and taking a definite approach of any kind gives people a comforting sense of control in a difficult situation.

But some folks claim to know that you should do (1). All the folks who wrote the books mentioned in this 24 Oct 88 syndicated column, which I'm reproducing because of its competence, clarity, and usefulness to those wanting exposure to this genre of "healing" literature.

Usefulness: If a