

Healing of High Grade Soft Tissue Sarcoma Metastasized to Lung by Herbal Therapy

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Abstract

The participant of this study, John (not real name) was 39 years old male when he was diagnosed with high grade soft tissue sarcoma in 2000. He was given 6 months to live. John underwent a surgery. Unfortunately the surgeon did not completely remove the tumours. Three month later he underwent a second surgery whereby the second surgeon attempted to remove whatever tumours were left behind in the first surgery. This was then followed by 21 radiation treatment. About one and half years later, the cancer metastasized to John's lung. John underwent a third surgery to remove the nodules in his lung and the surrounding tissues. From the beginning, John adamantly refused to undergo chemotherapy and opted for herbal therapy instead. He changed his diet, lifestyle and took herbs since April 2000 up till this day. John did not suffer any recurrence and is in excellent health.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The senior author (CKHT) is a practising herbalist and therefore has financial interest in the herbs mentioned in this article.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Soft tissue sarcomas (STS) are rare, heterogeneous group of malignant tumors that arise almost anywhere in the body originating from the muscle, fascia, connective tissues and fibrous tissues of the body (1,2,3). STS is a disease of the adult, occurring most commonly in persons between 30 and 60 years of age. Only rhabdomyosarcoma occurs in young children (2).

STS initially presents as an symptomatic mass. About 50 % occur in the extremities (the arms, legs, hands, or feet), 40 % occur in the trunk (chest, back, hips, shoulders, and abdomen), and 10 % occur in the head and neck (1,4,5).

Currently, more than 50 histologic types of STS have been identified – the most common being fibrous histiocytoma (28%), leiomyosarcoma (12%), liposarcoma (15%) and synovial sarcoma (10%) (1).

Prognosis and Metastasis: The prognosis for patients with adult STS depends on patient's age and the size, histologic grade, and stage of the tumor (3). Low-grade tumors are usually curable by surgery alone while high-grade tumors greater than 5 centimeters in diameter have the greatest

tendency to metastasize. (1, 3, 6). The overall five-year survival rate of patients with STS is between 50% - 60% (9). Most patients die of metastatic disease, generally within two to three years of the initial diagnosis. The most common site of metastasis is the lungs. Other potential sites are the bone, brain and liver (1, 5).

Treatment: In the 1970s, treatment for most patients with extremity sarcomas was amputation. In spite of that a large number of patients still died of metastatic disease. Currently limb-sparing surgery plus radiation (and in some cases chemotherapy) has since replaced amputation as the main treatment approach (6, 7, 8).

Kaled Aleltiar et al reported that 14% of patients developed local recurrence, 39% of patients developed distant metastasis and 39% of patients died (7) when 202 adult patients with primary high-grade soft tissue sarcoma of the extremity were treated with limb-sparing surgery and adjuvant brachytherapy. Unfortunately, radiation therapy was associated with fibrosis, necrosis, edema, fractures, and contractures, all of which can substantially impair function (1).

The use of chemotherapy to prevent the spread of soft tissue sarcomas has not been proven to be effective. (3, 4). The response of STS to chemotherapy ranged from being very responsive to resistant. Only three drugs—doxorubicin,

dacarbazine, and ifosfamide—are consistently associated with response rates of 20% or more in patients with advanced soft tissue sarcomas (1, 3, 6, 8). The absolute benefit from adjuvant chemotherapy was between 6% - 10%. There was no overall survival benefit at 10 years (6). Adjuvant chemotherapy caused adverse toxic effects such as myelotoxicity, epithelial toxicity, painful hand/foot syndrome and potentially severe cardiac toxicity (1).

CASE PRESENTATION

Medical history: John (not real name) was 39 years old when he noticed a small lump between his upper thigh and testis. This was in February 1999. Since there was no pain he ignored it until the swelling increased to the size of a ping-pong ball some months later. In March 2000, John underwent a surgery to remove the cancerous lump. Histopathology report indicated a malignant tumour with features consistent with high grade soft tissue sarcoma. His doctor told him to get his papers in order and that he would probably have only 6 months to live.

About 3 months after the surgery, John seek a second opinion and was told by the second surgeon that the tumours were not completely removed during the first surgery. John underwent another surgery. This was followed by 21 sessions of radiotherapy. On both occasions – after the first and second surgeries, John declined chemotherapy. About a year and half later, the cancer metastasised to his lung. John underwent a third surgery to remove the nodules in his lung and the surrounding tissues. He again declined chemotherapy. From the beginning, since April 2000 up to this writing, John opted for the holistic herbal therapy.

On 1 November 2006 we had the privilege of meeting John. Excerpts of our video-taped conversation are as in Appendix 1.

DISCUSSION

It has been more than a decade since we started CA Care. Our mission was to provide care to cancer patients who wanted an alternative or complementary option to their cancer treatment. Our CA Care Therapy advocates the use of herbs, change of lifestyle and diet, seeking of Spiritual help besides seeking the best of the non-invasive medical help. Over the years we have seen and documented numerous success stories (in thirteen books and numerous papers). CA Care currently undertakes a project conducting in-depth interviews with patients to find out the factors that had contributed to their well being. In short, we want to know

why they succeed in their treatment. This paper is an example of what we have done and shall be doing in the years to come.

In this case study, John presented with a serious case of soft tissue sarcoma which according to his doctor's prognosis was 6 months. John was advised to get his papers in order. The surgeon's prognosis was based on the aggressiveness of the tumour having resected a big chunk of it – the size of a “Milo tin (small milk can)”. About one and a half years later the cancer metastasized to his lung in spite of the previous radiation treatment. From the point of modern medicine, John's refusal to undergo chemotherapy was tantamount to being “real foolish”. But John was not naïve. He is a professional whose job is analyzing risks and benefits of business ventures. Therefore to him, making cancer treatment decision was just a part and parcel of what his specialty was all about. After much consideration, John he decided not to go for chemotherapy. He said: “going through chemotherapy does not really guarantee a cure or success. Chemotherapy kills both the good and the bad cells. The immune system will be weakened and compromised and you would probably succumb to the treatment rather than the disease itself.” John was fully aware that his cancer was basically a problem of an immune system gone wrong. Chemotherapy, radiotherapy and toxic oral-drugs destroy the body's immune system. As such, how do you expect the body to heal?

We always warn cancer patients that the alternative healing path is not for everybody. It is not an easy path and may be just as risky as undergoing chemotherapy. Cancer patients need to know that they cannot continue to live their old lifestyle and feed on the same diet that had brought about their cancer in the first place. They need to change and change they must if they want to live. This is in direct conflict with what most oncologists tell their patients – “cancer patients can eat anything we like. There is no scientific proof to say that cancer is related to what we eat or the way we eat”. John recognised this conflict. He said: “I had reached a point where I had to decide whether it was my life or the food. If I wanted to get well I better be mindful of what I eat. It was a choice between my life or food. So, it was a matter of which one was important.” John agreed that initially it was difficult for him to make changes but he said: “I told myself – “if I want to get well – I'll have to do it.”

When asked the factors that made him what he is today, John replied that it was the holistic approach to solving the problem. He attributed his success to his strong belief in

God. To him human being can fail but God is never failing and he derived much comfort and strength from his communication with the Divine. The second important factor is the strong support from his family and friends. The third factor is his positive outlook about life and his willingness to change. These are important attributes that made him succeed and sadly not many patients have them.

APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPT OF VIDEO-TAPED INTERVIEW

CURRENT HEALTH

Question: How are you now?

Answer: Supposedly good. As a person I am normal except that stamina-wise I was not as good as previously. I cannot do strenuous exercise. Otherwise, I have no complaints.

Q: Have you gone back to the doctor for check up?

A: I do check up every year for the past 2 years. The last one was in May 2006. They did the CT scan, X-ray, ultrasound, etc., etc. There was nothing.

MEDICAL HISTORY

Q: Tell us about your medical problem.A: It started with a small lump, the size of a pea, in my thigh. I detected it in September 1998. Because I was afraid of operation, I kept on delaying until the lump grew bigger and bigger. I did not go and see the doctor about it. The lump grew to the size of a ping-pong ball. At that time, I wanted to buy an insurance policy and had to undergo a medical examination. The GP examined me and asked me to go for a check up. So I went to a specialist in a private hospital.

In a matter of a few days later, I had an operation. This was done in our local specialist hospital. The doctor resected quite a lot of the tissues out – the size of a “Milo tin”. He tried to take out as much as possible, including the muscles – because it had already spread. The operation was done in March 2000.

Q: After the surgery, did the doctor ask you to do chemotherapy?A: He suggested it but I did not do it. After this surgery I went to consult another doctor in Singapore. I did a second operation in Singapore in May 2000. This was because the tumour was not fully removed. After this second operation I received 21 times of radiation treatment. I was asked to do chemotherapy again but I said no.

Q: Were the doctors angry when you did not want to go for chemotherapy?A: They insisted but I stood my ground. They were not angry because one of my relatives was also a doctor in the same hospital and they knew each other.

Q: And your relative was not angry with you for not going for chemo?A: No, no, he knew my character. I could be a stubborn person. He advised me but at the end of the day, the decision had to be mine. With due respect to the professionals – lawyers or doctors – I had no good opinion about them.

Q: After you had refused to do chemo, did they still pester you to do chemo again later?A: Oh ya. I had to do a third operation in December 2001 – that was about one and half years after the second operation. This was because the cancer had spread to my lungs. I did this operation in Singapore. They removed the nodules in the lungs and the surrounding area.

Q: Did they radiate the lungs after that?A: No, no, only the surgery. And they asked me to do chemo again. They told me: “This time you must do chemotherapy.” I said no again.

Q: Were they angry this time around?A: I didn't think they were angry but they were a bit upset.

Q: Didn't they point out that was because you did not do chemo the first time that the cancer had spread to your lung?A: I couldn't remember what they told me, but I said: “No.”

Q: What about your family members?A: They left the decision to me. They realized that chemo was not necessarily good for me. You were taking chances only and if the immune system was weak the result would be even worse.

Q: Okay, after the third surgery – no chemo, no radiation – what did you do?A: Until now – I did nothing, only taking your herbs and also some supplements. So from 2000 till now, it is coming to 7 years now.

Q: What made you so adamant in not wanting do chemotherapy?A: I held on to my conviction of not doing chemotherapy after reading your book. You mentioned that after going through chemotherapy it does not really guarantee a cure or success. Chemotherapy kills both the good and the bad cells. The immune system will be weakened and compromised and you would probably succumb to the treatment rather than the disease itself. Based of that, I made my firm decision – no chemotherapy. If I had not read your book, I would have gone for chemotherapy because I had reached a point where I was about to say “yes” to chemotherapy. But then I pulled back. At that time the doctor was telling me that I could not afford to wait any more – he was putting pressure for me to go for

chemotherapy.

TREATMENT SATISFACTION

Q: Going back to your treatments – you had surgeries and radiotherapy. If you had to do it all over again, would you have done the same thing? For example, let's start from the time you had this small pea-sized lump.A: I would not have ignored that small lump. I would have taken immediate action to remove it. I would not wait until it had grown to the size of a ping-pong ball. As for the surgeries I would have done them. As for the radiotherapy after the second surgery I might or might not do it. Radiotherapy is equally bad. With the present knowledge that I have, I would probably not do it.

Q: Were you happy with the doctor who did the first surgery?A: I was not really happy with him, but I would not blame him either. He was referred to me by my church member. At that point in time, he suspected that the lump was cancerous and he advised me not to delay anymore. Within 3 days I made a decision to go for the surgery. After thinking over it, I felt that it was a bit too fast.

Q: Okay, how did you feel about that – did you feel compelled to do the surgery?A: In a way, I felt compelled because at that time I did not have much knowledge about it, so I tended to listen to professional advice. I felt that I needed a bit more time to think about it. The doctor said: “You better go for surgery but that decision is up to you.”

Q: But on the other hand, what was there for you to waste more time when the lump was getting bigger?A: Because before this surgery, I went to see another doctor who suggested that I did a biopsy first before the operation. Also when I did the second surgery, the doctor in Singapore did mention that my first surgery was not done properly – there was something left behind. Because of that I was not 100% satisfied with the first doctor. I would say only 70% happy.

Q: But was he a caring person?A: He was caring but he did not give me much choice. I was asked to make a decision too soon. But I would say that he did his job. He told me what I had to do and he said: “Don't delay any more.”

Q: Okay, as a conclusion, am I right to say that as a person he was a caring doctor and that he had done his job. But whether he was 70% or 100% competent was a different matter. A: Yes, you are correct.

Q: What about the doctor who did your second surgery?A: After the first operation I went to Singapore on the

suggestion of my brother, for a second opinion and also as follow up check. After doing a CT scan the doctor told me that there was still some tumour left behind. He suggested another surgery. I was more pleased with what he did. He operated on the same spot of the first surgery and the resultant scar was very nice. It was a nicely done job. I would say that professionally he was a better doctor. I would give more than 90% (as opposed to 70% to the first doctor).

Q: Was he a caring person too?A: Yes, I was very satisfied with him.

Q: You did radiotherapy after that – were you happy with the radiologist?A: Yes, yes even though it was hectic for me. I had to travel to Singapore everyday for the treatment and then came back to work after that. I was already working at that time. I had to go there for 21 times!

Q: Then you had a third surgery – this time it was the lung. Were you happy with the doctor?A: They detected a lump in my lung. I was fully satisfied with this doctor too. He was caring and did a good job.

Q: You seemed to have a wonderful experience with all your doctors.A: Yes, I believed they were very professional and had done their job well. They took time to explain to me what they wanted to do with me. At the end of it they gave me a choice and said: “It is up to you to decide.” They did not push me to make a decision.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CANCER

Q: Did you have any knowledge about cancer before this?A: No, not much. I have not read anything about it.

Q: What about now?A: Yes, slightly more knowledge.

COPING STRATEGY

Q: Currently, how do you feel – did you ever feel that the cancer is coming back? Would you worry about this?A: No, not to that extent. I don't worry about it. I have so many other things to worry about. I trust my God and I am committed to my God and I believe He has healed me fully.

Q: When you were first told you had cancer – how did you react?A: I denied it. All this while I had been a very healthy person, I never fell sick and I did not go and see doctors, etc. When the doctor said it was cancer, I said: “No lah, it cannot happen to me. It cannot be true.”

Q: How long were you in this denial state?A: For some months I ignored the lump. I did not go for a check up. I kept

telling myself this thing couldn't happen to me. It was until the lump had grown to the size of a ping-pong ball that I told myself: "Something has to be done." So I went to see the specialist.

Q: So when the doctor said you had to be operated on, how did you feel?A: I had no choice.

Q: Were you shocked then? Did you believe it then?A: I began to accept it. I had no other choice – it had gone bigger.

Q: What was the most stressful period that you had experience in this cancer journey?A: The "knowing" of having the cancer was the most stressful. It was not so much of the surgery. Surgery was a one-time thing. So during the time I was told I had cancer was the beginning of the psychological stress. From that time on to about a year later, after my first and second operations, I suffered bouts of self-denial and struggling.

Q: What was this struggle?A: "Why this thing happened to me?" "Why me?"

Q: Did you say: "It is not fair."A: Yes, definitely, I asked God that.

Q: Besides denial, were you trying to avoid it? Didn't want to talk about it?A: Even after 3 years later I did not even want to talk about this subject although I did go for my check up. Except for my family members and some close friends, I kept this away from others. When people asked me: "Hey I heard you went for an operation", my response was: "No. no." I did not want to even mention the word "cancer." To me this word was a taboo – it should not have happened to me. Once I had a very close friend who leaked out my problems. I asked him: "Why are you telling all these to others?" At one time my sister-in-law was spreading news about my problem. I didn't like it and reprimanded her.

Q: Now you are talking to us about cancer – do you feel comfortable?A: I did not feel comfortable – about 10% to 20% uncomfortable.

Q: But do you mind sharing this experience then?A: When I was told that you were coming I told myself: "If I can help people by sharing this experience, then why not. And also your herbs had helped me to a certain extent – so I felt I should give back to society too, by trying to help others.

Q: What do you mean by "not comfortable"?A: This word "cancer" in my mind – I shouldn't get it. I just don't want to talk about the experiences I had gone through. This was

more of a psychological and emotional trauma.

Q: Don't you think that by talking and letting go, it would be better for you?A: Well, by talking to people and if I find this helps them, then it is okay. But I don't go to the point of being "busy body" telling the whole town about it. At one stage this cancer would affect my job as well. As a business consultant I could not tell people that I was sickly and that I was going to die, etc. My clients would think: "I am going to leave my company to you – how long can you survive?" So, these are the factors I had to consider.

Q: Was this also because of shame?A: No, it was not that. I wanted to find the answer – why, why? It is only lately (after more than 3 years) that I had opened up. This was after seeing 3 other persons who suffered worse than me. Also, I realized that I need to help people. In trying to help others I have to share my life's experiences.

Q: We understand the negative impact of cancer and why you wanted to keep it away from others. Not wanting to talk about it was one thing, but did you on the other hand do something to learn more about it?A: Yes, yes, I did a lot of reading to find out what causes cancer, how to cope and handle it. This had happened and my next step was what to do next. I am not a person who would give up easily. I am a fighter and I had to do something. I could not just sit down and wait.

Q: Did you ever make jokes about it?A: No, no.

SPIRITUALITY

Q: Let me ask, did you blame God for this cancer?A: Initially yes. But not so much about blaming, but asking "Why this thing happened to me?" However, later I began to accept it. I realized God had His purpose because from there I saw a lot of wonderful things.

Q: Did you not feel lonely?A: To me this cancer should not have happened to me because all the while I was very healthy. No, no I did not really feel lonely. I had been talking to my God. I spent my time with myself, my family and my God. There was a time when I confined myself to prayers. Before I had cancer, I was running all over.

Q: It was only after 3 years that you had accepted the fact that you had cancer. Do you now testify and share your life's experience with others? A: Yes, when I went on mission trips, I told people that I had once faced death. The doctor only gave me 6 months to live. The doctor told me as a friend, that I had better get all my papers ready and transfer

everything to my family. So from 6 months it has been more than 6 years now and I am still alive.

Q: For 3 years you did not want to talk about your cancer – when was the turning point that made you decided to talk and share? A: I gradually realized that God had given me a second chance in life and that it was now my turn to try and help others. Then for the first time I went on mission trip to a Karen refugee camp in Thailand. At that time I was not ready to share yet but I was caught on the spot. My pastor asked me to stand up and say something to those people. So this was my first experience of sharing. I talked about hope in God. For anything at all, if it is God's will then God will make a way. I told them that I had only 6 months to live but it was then already 3 years and I was still alive and well.

Q: How did you feel after the sharing? A: The people came to shake my hands and I found that they benefited from what I told them. I too felt good.

Q: You said you put God as number 1 in your life – was this during the initial period of your cancer or was it only now? A: As I have said, initially I was questioning God. God was not the number 1 yet at that time. It was only after I realized that He had a purpose for me.

Q: Oh, during the first 3 years, God was not the number 1? A: God was important – yes, but not as compared to now, because as I said, I was still fighting with God during that time – like why I got this? Why did He put me through this? But it did not mean that I did not trust God at that time. I also trusted Him. I did not have any other choice. There was no one else I could turn to.

Q: You were like Job? A: Yes – questioning Him but I still clung to Him. Belief in God probably contributed to 60% to 70% of the support. Like I have said earlier, human beings can only help to a certain extent and the rest we still have to depend on God. Human beings can fail but I have come to know that God is unfailing.

Q: Now you have cancer, did you pray more? A: I have grown closer to God. He was the Source I needed to go to.

Q: Would you like to express your feelings about the contributions of fellow believers, pastors and care group? A: In the initial stage the church raised some funds towards my medical expenses.

Q: Oh, did the church members knew about your problem? A: I told the pastor and he knew about my cancer

but I requested him to be discreet and disclose the minimum details. So he didn't use the word "cancer." He told the church that a member of the church had "a deadly disease which needed a surgery." Even up to 3 years later many church members did not know about my cancer.

DOCTOR'S PROGNOSIS

Q: When you were told you had 6 months, how did that affect you? A: Terrible. Initially I was shocked and I denied it. It could not be true. That was why I said, God can do miracles. Human beings are limited in what they can do. Based on his medical training, the doctor said that I developed the tumour in 1998 and it had grown to the size of a ping pong ball. Being an aggressive cancer, I would probably last 6 months.

Q: Now, have you met this doctor again? What did he say? A: I still went back to see him for medical check up. He was very surprised – "wah, you are still around!" He then asked me: "What do you eat, ar? Tell me something about the herbs that you took!" When I saw him I never fail to mention about your herbs.

Q: When he asked you about all these, was he really interested in what you were doing? A: Yes, he listened. He wanted to know more actually. I think nowadays more and more people are beginning to accept herbal medicine.

STRESS BEFORE CANCER

Q: What was your lifestyle like before cancer? A: Before I had this cancer my lifestyle was not right, due to the nature of my job. I was actually a business consultant – doing restructuring of companies for people. Before that I worked with the bank. So my job was rather stressful because I had to work within a time frame. I was probably 6 months away from home in one town, and again 6 months in another town. I had no family life though I was already married with kids. Of course, every week I took a trip home, stayed for a day and went off again. I had irregular meals and I worked late through the night. Also there were a lot of entertainment and I had to be among smokers. But I didn't smoke and I was a moderate drinker.

Q: How long were you under such stressful lifestyle? A: This consulting job – about 2 years and the bank, it was about 10 years.

Q: Were you happy working under such condition? A: Well, I had no choice. That was my bread and butter. Happy? Sometimes I was happy sometimes I was not – frustrated.

Q: Between the 2 years on your own and 10 years in the bank, which job was more stressful?A: It was a different setting. I left the bank because of the monotony of the job – writing report, submission for approval, etc. – helping people to make money but not myself. I kind of got bored of the job and went to start my own consultancy company. Time-wise it was more flexible and more rewarding too. So, the two jobs were a different kind of setting but they were equally stressful. In fact the consultancy job was even more stressful – being away from home with no proper family life, etc.

FAMILY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Q: Looking at your family – do you have brothers and sisters? And did they support you?A: Yes, my brothers and sisters supported me both emotionally and financially. For example my brother who stayed in Singapore, he would come and drove me to the Singapore hospital and again drove me back here. Yes, I know that I could depend on my brothers and sisters for help.

Q: If we were to ask who had given you the most support – who could that be?A: My God. I believed in God first. People are just complementary – they extended their physical support but I believed spiritual support was important. Human beings could only help to a certain extent only.

Q: You said: God first, then family members – what about your friends?A: Yes, I had a handful of close friends who gave me support. Close friends are not easy to come by! These friends provided me “listening ears” – they listened to my problems and offer some advices to the best of their knowledge. I shared the problems with this handful of close friends because I believed they would be able to help me compared to other friends who would just listen but after that did nothing except to “spin” the news in town.

Q: By sharing with these close friends, did you feel happy?A: Yes, I felt much better.

CA CARE THERAPY

Q: How did you know us?A: I got to know you through my brother-in-law who read about you in the Chinese newspapers.

Q: When did you first come to see us?A: I came to see you after my first operation and I started to take the herbs. That was in April 2000.

Q: When you first came, did you believe in what we were

doing?A: I always believe in herbals even before I had cancer. I did not believe in everything what the doctors say – with due respect to them. I have dealings with doctors and lawyers in my work, and I know that not all of them are “good” – they are still human beings and are not gods and they are not perfect. So when doctors advised me to do something, I always do my homework and double check – I don't take everything per se. This is my life.

Q: After you had cancer, many people told you to do many things?A: Yes, I listened to them. But at one stage I was very confused. The direct selling things – there were a lot of them in the market. They came and told me to take this and that. I told them: “Stop, stop. I'll make my own decision.” So when I came to CA Care I already had a positive opinion about herbals. After I read your book and articles I felt that there must be something good in it. So, I told myself: “Why not try it.” To me, we must have a believing heart. It was the same when I accepted Jesus. Before I became a Christian I never believe in God – I believed in my own strength. So, in the same way, I believe there was no harm for me to believe in your herbs – what if they can help me? It would be a bonus. What is my risk? I always look at my risk because in my job we always analysed the risk factors. So to me, taking herbs had not much risk. So I went ahead for there was no harm trying.

Q: Did you find it difficult to drink the herbal teas?A: Definitely, especially the Lung Tea – it was bitter. Anyway I still took it.

Q: Looking back, did you benefit from the herbs?A: Yes, surely. Sometimes we must have a positive outlook. If we are taking something and if we find it does not help us, we might as well not take it. The battle is all in the mind. Yes, I believe in what you do. The herbs definitely helped me. I have no doubt about that, but to what extent the herbs helped I don't know. I am still taking the herbs now and if I happened to “miss” taking it, I would not feel “right.”

Q: Was it difficult for you to change your diet?A: Initially yes – very hard but I had the will power. I told myself: “If I want to get well – I'll have to do it.” I used to love to eat satay (meat on stick), bak kua (sweet roasted meat), rojak (mixed fruits with local dressing), bak-kut-teh (herbal pork) and anything good at all. After I had cancer, I confined myself to eating steam vegetables and fruit juices and it was only later that I ventured into taking steam fish. I found it hard initially because there was no sugar, salts, etc.

Q: If we were to tell you to go back to your old diet or lifestyle again – would you do it?A: No, no – not worth it.

Q: You said it was hard to change but you did change, you did this happily or grudgingly?A: Not really grudgingly. I had reached a point where I had to decide whether it was my life or the food. If I wanted to get well I better be mindful of what I eat. It was a choice between my life or food. So, it was a matter of which one was important.

POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Q: You said it took you 3 years to see some blessing in this cancer – would you like to share what these blessings were?A: I believe it was God's way of turning me around. I got closer to Him. Before that I was a normal church goer – non-committal, never got involved in any activities or held any position, etc. After the surgery I was trying to rationalise what had happened. Then I realized that it was “time to wake up.” During that period I had a lot of time to “rest” and think. I talked and prayed to God a lot.

Q: What was the message God gave you?A: The impression was that I had to “buck up” with my lifestyle, reset my priority in life and at the same time have more compassion towards people. During my banking days I had no time to think of other people except finishing my work – there was not much time for people. For example for people who had cancer like me, now at least I understand them better and have more compassion for them.

Q: What about those people who do not have cancer – do you relate to them better too? A: Yes, I also advised them to change their lifestyle and even their diet – yes, I told them a lot of do's and don'ts.

Q: And only after 3 years you accepted what was going on?A: Yes and I changed my lifestyle. I confined myself to doing things only in this home-town. I stopped doing work on company restructuring, and now concentrate in loan application – helping people to apply for bank loans, etc. Now, I don't run around anymore. Of course, once a while I still go “outstation”. So my job is less stressful now. So, as I have said I changed my job strategy, rearranged my priority in life and became more appreciative of life. My relationship with people is slightly better now because I spend time with them instead of previously it was a touch-and-go kind of relationship.

Q: And your diet also changed?A: Yes, my diet is completely different now.

Q: Did you feel surer of yourself now?A: Yes, I have more confidence and feel I am more able to be in control. I feel I am a better person now than before – in the eyes of God and hopefully in other peoples' eyes too.

Q: How do you now perceive cancer in your life? Say for example cancer is now right in front of you – what would you say to this cancer?A: I would rebuke it. But if you look at the lifestyle of people nowadays, approximately 1 out of 3 people will get cancer. So it is unavoidable. Because of that I need to be more open now.

Q: So, cancer is good or bad for you?A: It all depends on how you look at it. I believe that God has a purpose. So with this cancer, I believe I can help other people. From that too I have more compassion towards people.

Q: Now that you have received the message – what is it that you are doing now to fulfill that message?A: Do God's will – do His work. I now go on mission trips to Cambodia, the Philippines, etc. to help people.

Q: Did that make you happy?A: Yes, I found it more fulfilling.

Q: Assuming that there are cancer patients listening to you now – what advice would you give them?A: I would ask them historical questions, like their lifestyle and try to find out how they get cancer. I would ask them to totally change their lifestyle and go for holistic approach – that is, change of lifestyle, change of diet and leading a spiritual life.

Q: What are the factors you think had contributed to what you are today?A: It is holistic. First, the spiritual aspect – my strong belief in God. Second, the support from my family and friends. Third, my outlook about life – my change of diet, lifestyle, etc.

Q: Now, do you honestly believe that you had made a good decision?A: Yes, I believe so, through God's guidance, I have made a good decision.

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