

# Alternative Therapy Has Its Place

## **GUEST COLUMN**

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Before I got cancer, I didn't even believe in taking vitamins, let alone any "alternate stuff." I mean who needs them if you eat properly. I used to think "Boy, you New Age people are weird. What's wrong with eating good healthy food, keeping fit and taking whatever the doctor orders?" Problem is, while all that conventional cancer medicine is draining out of your system, the wake of destruction it leaves behind does not.

It seems to me that, doctors are only too willing to give you the toxic drugs, or radiation, to get rid of the darn cancer, but when it comes to side effects, the medical field often has little or nothing to offer us. Whether for physical symptoms or emotional discomfort.

But times are changing, survivors are demanding more. And even the medical field agrees these days. As part of the design of the new University of New Mexico Cancer Center, a large area has been given to the Living Well Department - integrating conventional and alternative medicine to improve a patient's health, both during and after treatment.

Here in Seattle too, care is about the whole person. I'm not just a walking tumor. They're as interested in my quality of life as they are in my disease. Four years ago, in a New Mexico clinic, my experience was completely different. "Throwing up are we, nauseous? Oh well never mind. Put up with it." That's not just an illustration. It's an actual quote from a doctor.

Of the many people with cancer that I've met, I'd say most are using some kind of alternative therapy, either to alleviate symptoms, reduce stress or to try and improve their chances of survival. Most outside of their doctor's knowledge. And of course most of those are women.

What is it with you guys? You don't mind filling your body with cell destroying poisons, but to go for a massage would kill you! Your body, like mine, may not be model potential but I think they've seen worse. If it can make you feel better isn't it worth the time?

So call me crazy, but I'm living proof that alternative therapy, can not only draw the line between being able to get life saving chemo or not, but it can also make you feel that life is worth living, especially when you've sunk to the bottom of the pain or depression pit.

But does it work, or is it just a cancer patient's way of trying to take back some control? if you think something is going to make you feel better, chances are it probably will. But what if, as in my case, you were a skeptic and it still made you feel better. Then you may have to rethink your belief system.

So if you're searching for a way to feel better, and the pills aren't doing it, talk to a doctor who can step out of the "there must be a drug for this" mode. You don't have to look too far. Los Alamos does have them. And all over the country, many are getting the message: that life goes on after a cancer diagnosis. And the quality of that life, be it physical or mental, can be just as important. After all, we fought like hell to banish those tumors, don't we deserve to have our battle scars tended to as well?

*Kay Kerbyson and her family now live in Richland, Wash. She is an associate of the Los Alamos Council on Cancer, and President/Founder of Ovarian Cancer Together! Inc., a non-profit 501(c)(3) state based networking and support organization. Local resources for cancer survivors can be found at [www.losalamoscounciloncancer.org](http://www.losalamoscounciloncancer.org) or [www.ovariancancertogether.org](http://www.ovariancancertogether.org)*