



# Nurturing Spirit Through Complementary Cancer Care

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In the ever-changing world of cancer care, exploring treatment approaches that are holistic and interactive and emphasize the patient's role in the healing process is essential. According to medical oncologist Jeffrey R. Geffen MD, FACP, medicine exists for two distinct purposes: "The *relative* purpose of medicine is to relieve symptoms and to cure disease. But there is also an *ultimate* purpose, which extends beyond the physical realm to include the mind, heart, and spirit of every patient, and indeed of humanity as a whole" (Geffen, 2000, p. 13).

Complementary and integrative therapies, in conjunction with what often is termed "conventional" cancer treatment (e.g., surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, biotherapy), generate and promote a patient culture rooted in holistic healing. They provide both physical space and hands-on support for this patient culture to grow and thrive in a traditional medical environment.

The Ireland Cancer Center at Community Health Partners in the Cleveland suburb of Elyria, OH, is a community-setting affiliate of the Ireland Cancer Center at University Hospitals of Cleveland, a National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center. The center provides patients with access to cancer care and complementary therapies in one building. It incorporates radiation therapy, medical oncology, and the Center for Body, Mind, and Spirit, an innovative wellness program. Patient and caregiver services include support groups, educational programs, and complementary therapies. A healing garden includes a labyrinth (see Figures 1 and 2). For a detailed discussion of the use of labyrinths in health care, see the article by Griffith (2002).



FIGURE 1. THE HEALING GARDEN

Humor can be incorporated into care (see Figure 3). Laughter may be a useful cognitive-behavioral intervention; in one study, it was shown to reduce stress (measured by a self-completed stress scale) and stimulate immune function (measured by natural killer-cell cytotoxicity assay) (Bennett, Zeller, Rosenberg, & McCann, 2003). Other studies also have supported the therapeutic efficacy of laughter (Neuhoff & Schaefer, 2002; Rosner, 2002). Complementary therapies that are offered at the Ireland Cancer Center include tai chi (see Figure 4), yoga (see Fig-

ure 5), massage, and music and art therapy.

Through the use of complementary therapies, people touched by cancer, including patients, loved ones, and friends, find help in dealing with the psychological, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects of adapting to the life-changing illness. Staff members at the Ireland Cancer Center employ a patient-active approach that customizes a personal healing plan in conjunction with a patient's overall cancer treatment plan. Almost all of the services are made possible by support from foundations and private donors and are provided at no cost to patients and caregivers.

Dr. Belagodu Kantharaj, medical director of the Ireland Cancer Center at Community Health Partners, said, "Recent studies indicate that it is common for patients with cancer to find value in, and benefit from, complementary therapies. Because cancer is a disease that affects not only the body but also the heart, mind, and soul, these types of therapies are believed to improve well-being and quality of life. It is most important

that the oncologist is involved in and openly discussing the choices patients make in their pursuit of healthful survival strategies.

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