



A Powerful Tool

Using homeopathy during conventional cancer care

by AMY ROTHENBERG, ND, DHANP



AS YOU MAY'VE HEARD, EARLIER THIS YEAR I WAS DIAGNOSED WITH BREAST CANCER, AND AFTER successful surgery in February, I began chemotherapy in March. Having been blessed with exuberant health and vitality to date, this is a first for me. I aim to be loving and gracious to my caregivers, keep a good sense of humor, and work my strong mental game, but nonetheless, I am most definitely in the patient role right now. Though this is not how I envisioned 2014 unfolding, I am learning from it all—taking time for healing and experiencing life and health-care from a patient perspective.

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I have many thoughts on this new role but will focus here on just one: homeopathy is amazing! Remedies have enabled me to sidestep all painkillers after my two-day hospital stay for bilateral mastectomy. Remedies got me through some rather uncomfortable nights. Remedies were remarkably effective with little things that arose after the procedure. And our precious homeopathic medicines continue to serve me well in both preventing and addressing side effects of my other treatments. I knew this would be the case from my long years working with patients who have cancer, but to experience the effectiveness firsthand brings further light to the subject.

Homeopathy with conventional care

There are many approaches that use homeopathy to treat the cancer itself; here, however, I will focus on using homeopathy alongside conventional cancer treatment and will share some of the most common remedies I have prescribed acutely for my patients to address symptoms that may arise during cancer treatment.

When we use homeopathy to treat a person with cancer, we use the same careful case-taking methods as with any patient: we find out what is most bothersome to the patient, figure out if there are any clear modalities (what makes the pain/discomfort/symptom/better or

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worse), understand the nature of the symptoms (i.e., what kind of pain or discomfort), and then aim to understand how that symptom fits in with the rest of the person. (Please see my article “Facing Cancer” in the May/June 2008 issue of *Homeopathy Today* for further information on treating patients with cancer. Find it in the *Homeopathy Today* archives at www.homeopathycenter.org.)

It is important to remember that even when a patient seems to be experiencing new, acute symptoms, they don't necessarily need a new remedy aimed narrowly at those acute symptoms; instead, they may need a dose of their constitutional remedy to assist them. So, if you are not sure what to do and the person's modalities (e.g., what makes them feel better or worse), general symptoms, and temperament are either similar to their usual state or are well covered by the constitutional remedy they have needed in the recent past, it makes good sense to give that constitutional remedy.

Surgery on the menu

For many cancer patients, surgery will be part of the treatment plan. Pain, issues related to anesthesia, and challenges with digestion are common post-surgical after-effects that homeopathy can help. I do routinely recommend *Arnica* after surgery to decrease pain and promote healing, usually a 1M potency daily for three days, provided there are no other pressing issues for the patient. If a person feels bruised after abdominal or gynecological surgery and *Arnica* is not offering enough relief, *Bellis perennis* will often help. If a patient has extreme pain at the incision site, I have prescribed *Staphysagria* to good effect.

If a patient has a difficult time coming out of anesthesia, I sometimes prescribe *Phosphorus* (especially if they had exces-

sive blood loss) or *Nux moschata*. For patients who get a severe headache after spinal anesthesia, I have successfully used *Belladonna*, particularly when the headache is pounding, the eyes are glassy, and the head is hot, or *Veratrum album*, when there is also vomiting, diarrhea, chilliness, and extreme weakness. For issues related to constipation, *Nux vomica* often comes in handy; for nausea and loose stools, remember *Arsenicum album*.

Making chemo more comfortable

Chemotherapy aims to kill cancer cells, which by nature, are rapidly dividing. Hopefully it does its job well, but it also can wreak havoc on other cells that divide rapidly, like those that line the digestive tract. For loose stools that may result, *Arsenicum album* can be very helpful especially if the bowel movements cause pain and burning. Mouth sores are often helped with the remedy *Borax*; these sores often bleed when touched. *Natrum muriaticum* is another remedy that can help with mouth sores that extend to the lips, which are dry and cracked. *Mercurius solubilis* may help when mouth sores are accompanied by exquisite pain, excessive salivation, and a bad taste and smell from the mouth.

Many patients receive conventional medications after chemotherapy to help the bone marrow produce more infection-fighting white blood cells. Neulasta® is one such drug, and for some patients it causes tremendous bone pain and achiness, almost flu-like symptoms. I have used *Symphytum* to good effect in these cases where the bone pain is primary. If the patient has ongoing days feeling like they have the flu—dull, drowsy, head stuffed up, bone weary—I will use *Gelsemium*.

Some chemotherapeutic agents have the side effect of causing peripheral nerve damage (neuropathy); for patients who develop such numbness, prickling, burning, or strange feelings in the hands and feet, I have used *Hypericum* to good effect. Other conventional cancer drugs have particular impact on the bladder or the heart or the liver or the lung. Depending on the symptoms and the way

a patient experiences them, I prescribe accordingly.

For patients who become anemic during chemo, I will use a low potency of *Ferrum phosphoricum* daily (Boericke's *Materia Medica* notes that *Ferrum phosphoricum* 3X increases hemoglobin), or if their overall symptoms match, I give the remedy *Phosphorus*. I am always keeping an eye on my patient's emotional health as well and will not hesitate to give a remedy for depression or anxiety or feeling overwhelmed—all emotions that any patient with a serious diagnosis may experience.

Keep on keeping on

I have been buoyed by the generous and ongoing outpouring of love and prayers and good thoughts I have received this year; if you'd like a specific verbiage, this will do: “Let Amy go through treatments well & be blessed with a return to vibrant health.”

I feel incredibly blessed to have homeopathic medicine carrying me along, which leads me to say: keep on your path with homeopathy! You have a powerful tool in your hands for helping others. Keep that in the forefront of your mind, and keep improving your skills with study and practice—it's worth every minute!

I have written two pieces for the *Huffington Post* about cancer and naturopathic supportive treatments if you would like to read more: “Naturopathic Oncology” <http://tinyurl.com/lk9talb8> and “Say Goodbye to the Girls” <http://tinyurl.com/l3h6opc>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Amy Rothenberg, ND, DHANP, practices in Enfield, Connecticut (www.nhcmcd.com) and teaches with the New England School of Homeopathy (www.nesh.com). New NESH Courses are beginning in Boston (October 2014) and near Seattle (January 2015); see the website for details. She is currently the president of the Massachusetts Society

of Naturopathic Doctors (www.msnd.org) working on legislation to license naturopathic doctors in that state. You can follow her blog at www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-rothenberg-nd/. Her book, *The A Cappella Singer Who Lost Her Voice & Other Stories from Natural Medicine*, can be found on Amazon or at www.amyrothenberg.com.

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