ANTIOXIDANTS AND CHEMOTHERAPY

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According to as recent analysis of 5 year survival rates, oncology has contributed little to the cure of cancer. Credit for the fight in cancer has to go to the diagnosticians, surgeons, radiologists, histopalologists and radiotherapists.

With chemotherapy contributing a 2.3% success rate in solid adult cancers over 5 years as opposed to a 60% cure rate by others in the medical profession, to come out swinging from this position is audacious in the extreme.[1]

Who really is the emperor with no clothes?
The failure of chemotherapy can be attributed to the real phenomenon of chemo resistance and anything that can be done in this area will be of great benefit to cancer sufferers.

Chemotherapy in its current form is not the answer as a long term cure for cancer. Every new drug that is used runs into the problem of chemo resistance and toxic side effects. To say we don't know why this is happening is not correct. Any endeavour to research molecular biology, cell signalling chemistry and receptor biology will highlight the reasons why chemotherapy is failing our patients.

Common practice in oncology is to denigrate the use of antioxidants in combination with chemotherapy. This is because antioxidants supposedly negate the free radical formation at the mitochondria which in turn causes apoptosis to the tumour cell. However, it is this unopposed free radical formation that stimulates inflammation and the activity of transcription factors such as NF Kappa B that lead to its long term failure. NF Kappa B is effectively inhibited by natural substances such as Green Tea and Genistein whilst supporting the apoptotic effect of chemotherapy.[2345678]

Professor Avni Sali from Swinburne University in Melbourne, when asked about the results of a Meta analysis of randomised studies comparing the use of antioxidants, said different authors seem to be coming up with different results.

My reading of the situation is that certain antioxidants such as Vitamin A and possibly Vitamin E are not helpful and these antioxidants have no place in oncology practice. However, there is no evidence in my opinion that other antioxidants have a negative effect. On the contrary some of the studies on antioxidant trials conclude the use of antioxidants is helpful in conjunction with other cancer treatments. The evidence points to a decrease in side effects, the possibility of longer sustained chemotherapy with higher doses while some studies suggest improved long term outcomes.[91011121314]
In the latest review by Block et al, published in INTJ cancer in May 2008, he states "Our analysis suggested in fact that the concurrent use of supplements and chemotherapy treatments might produce better tumour responses and increased survival."[15]

So why are patients, knowing the dismal results of long term chemotherapy and requesting to use some form of natural therapy in conjunction with chemotherapy met with such resistance and contempt? If there was clear evidence of harm from natural therapy this would be understandable. However no such evidence exists, except for the two antioxidants mentioned above.

I have spent the last twenty years studying the effects of natural therapies in cancer. I belong to the College of Nutrition and Environmental Medicine. This college teaches nutrition to Doctors and allied professionals.
Biochemistry and nutrition are taught minimally in medical school and I believe strongly that postgraduate training in nutrition as provided by the College of Nutrition and Environmental Medicine is a necessary requirement to fill this gap
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The basis of abnormal cell functioning is aberrant biochemical functioning. The advances in biochemistry, molecular biology, cell signalling chemistry and cell receptor chemistry have been huge in the last eight years. Any reading of this material will show the enormous research that has gone into the use of natural substances in medicine.

There is a large proportion of the public that want an integrated approach using natural medicines alongside conventional pharmacology. Denigrating the doctors who can provide this and are trained in this area only creates division. The result will be a further movement of patients into the non medical world of untrained practitioners where there is little regulation.

I would like to see more interaction in this area for the benefit of the patients. I invite more informed discussion on natural medicine's role in oncology so that patients are not caught up in the middle where they will not benefit. All members of the medical profession, including those who believe that natural substances have a role to play in the care of cancer patients, should be invited to develop strategies and discuss pro's and con's and thus provide the best information that patients can then use to make a decision regarding their own treatment.

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