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The Failure of Chemotherapy

by Dr. Zoltan Rona, M.D., M.Sc

Chemotherapy has been a media sacred cow and one of the mainstays of conventional cancer treatments since the 1960s. Few dare to question or criticize its growing use. Those who do are often met with vigorous personal attacks.

While helping to reduce the mortality from childhood leukemias, Hodgkin's disease and other rare cancers, chemotherapy has done virtually nothing to cure or prolong survival from big killers like cancers of the lung, breast, colon, rectum and prostate. Well over 50 percent of all cancer patients receive chemotherapy, yet these relatively toxic drugs help only five percent of these cases.

Chemotherapy drugs work by killing cancer cells. Unfortunately, they also kill healthy normal cells and depress the immune system-making the recipient more susceptible to various infectious diseases like pneumonia. Side effects include hair loss, fatigue, weight loss, mouth sores, nausea, vomiting, easy bruising, bone marrow suppression and heart muscle damage. Not all chemotherapy is the same; some types offer fewer side effects than others. Due to the harmful effects of chemotherapy on the immune system, secondary tumors can occur up to 25 times more often than the expected rate.

Do As They Say...

Another disturbing fact about chemotherapy is that the majority of specialists who prescribe such drugs would refuse to take them if they or their families had cancer themselves. According to one survey published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* in 1987, 81 percent of cancer specialists would not consent to a drug trial due to the ineffectiveness of chemotherapy and its unacceptable degree of toxicity.

"Response rate alone is a poor parameter by which to assess therapeutic benefit in advanced breast cancer; it does not predict survival, and its effect on quality of life is very much determined by the nature of the treatment used." Macauley and Smith, 1986

Proponents of chemotherapy counter criticisms by quoting statistics such as 75 percent response or "success" rates with chemotherapy in Stages III-IV of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, prostate cancer and multiple myeloma.

What they do not tell you is that subsequent disease-free survival rates are low to non-existent and that doing nothing may be no worse with respect to actual years of survival.

One of the things noted by many clinicians and researchers is that patients who have received chemotherapy sometimes seem to have a sudden accelerated growth of their cancer. In other words, the chemotherapy triggers the further spread of the disease. These and other observations about chemotherapy have been reported and well documented in such books as *The Cancer Industry and Questioning Chemotherapy* both by Ralph W. Moss. A Canadian author, John J. Moelaert, goes even further than Moss in his criticism of conventional cancer treatments in his very readable new book *The Cancer Conspiracy* (see <http://members.home.net/jmoelaert> or call (250) 472-0061).

Define Success

It is true that chemotherapeutic drugs offer a temporary shrinkage of tumors (usually referred to as a response or "success" rate). But for some patients there is little, if any evidence that this shrinkage correlates with increased patient survival. The survival rate, for all intents and purposes, may be no different. With the numerous adverse

effects of chemotherapy, one surely has to wonder whether or not the treatment is worth taking at all. The question to ask the oncologist is "Will this treatment prolong my survival and by how many years?" and not "What is the success rate of this treatment?"

"Even if they are 'cured,' many people experience recurrence years after successful treatment," says Moss. "Furthermore, if a treatment leaves the patient disabled, disfigured, incapacitated or chronically exhausted (not to mention bankrupted), it is hardly reasonable to call that a cure in the normal sense of the term."

Chemotherapy and Antioxidants

Regardless of the sobering facts about chemotherapy, there are still many people who are willing to accept the risks in the quest to kill cancer cells. Individuals well-versed in various forms of natural healing will likely want to use vitamins, minerals and herbs in combination with chemotherapy.

It is generally accepted that the use of antioxidant vitamin and mineral supplements like vitamins A, C, E and selenium can prevent or reduce some of the unpleasant side effects of chemotherapy. Also, a long list of herbs and herbal formulae (including echinacea and Essiac) and other natural remedies (bovine colostrum, thymic protein a, acidophilus, etc) are able to boost the immune system.

What is not well known is that most of these nutrients, when used in high doses, can interfere with the action of the chemotherapeutic drugs. Antioxidants not only protect healthy normal cells but also protect cancer cells from the killing effects of the chemotherapy. In other words, if one wants to use chemotherapy to kill off cancer cells, the concomitant use of antioxidants can defeat the purpose of the drug therapy.

Using vitamins, minerals and other natural supplements as biological medicines is not necessarily a bad thing during conventional cancer treatments. If they are used well after the cancer-cell-killing effects of the chemotherapy have fully been exploited, they can help a great deal in preventing some of the more serious side effects like heart damage. It all depends on the timing of their use as well as on the type of chemotherapy used. If you want to use chemotherapy as well as a more natural approach, consulting a health care practitioner familiar with both conventional and biological medicine therapies is absolutely essential.

About the Author

Dr Zoltan Rona is the author of several best selling books and the publisher of *HealthWise Digest*, a new Canadian health newsletter.

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