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## REMARKABLE RECOVERIES

**Bernie Siegel, MD**

Modern medicine has not explored the issues of self-healing and of patients who exceed survival expectations. The reason is that we either give the treatment the credit or dismiss them as miracles or "spontaneous remissions." Medicine does not study successes like these because it believes that one cannot learn from spontaneous events. However, when we think of these cases as unique to the patient and self-induced, we are more likely to ask patients for their stories and learn about survival behavior.

It has been known for a long time that psychological factors can contribute explanations for so-called "spontaneous" remissions. Psychologist Bruno Klopfer, back in the 1940s, was given 24 personality profiles of cancer patients and correctly predicted 19 times who would have a fast or slow growing cancer. In one case he couldn't decide and his predictions were wrong four times (Klopfer, 1957). Yet when patients enter their doctor's office and are given a diagnosis, they are not handed a list which tells them how to behave and act like a survivor or a list of questions to determine their personality profile and find who is more likely to become a spontaneous long-term survivor and who needs psychotherapy.

Doctors are not trained to communicate with patients and so our words can also kill or cure. I found that wordswordswords can literally become swords. Authority figures are hypnotic and most doctors are hypnotic. Sadly, most of their subtle and not so subtle suggestions are negative and induce more side effects and earlier deaths, because they refer to statistics and eliminate hope. Statistics do not apply to individuals and there is no false hope.

Psychiatrist George Solomon, when working with AIDS patients early in the epidemic, came up with eight questions that define an Immune Competent Personality. From these questions he could predict who would be a long-term survivor (Solomon and Temoshok 2000). On a personal level I have seen how one's beliefs and personality can cure or kill. I know individuals who have gone from HIV+ to HIV- because of changes in their lifestyles and beliefs and others who were dying because they believed they had AIDS. One man, sick for two years, with all the symptoms of the disease, recovered in two weeks when his doctor discovered the computer printout reporting him as HIV+ was in error.

Psychiatrist Caroline Thomas, at Johns Hopkins, had medical students fill out a personality profile and draw pictures of themselves. From the profiles and drawings she found a connection with diseases they developed later in life and could predict what disease they were likely to get and the part of the body likely to be involved from their drawings (Shaffer, et al. 2006). Even she was surprised to find a correlation with cancer, too.

Our bodies love us but if we do not love them and our lives, then our body tries to get us out of here as fast as it can. Monday morning there are more suicides, strokes, heart attacks and other illnesses than on any other day of the week. That is no coincidence because of the ways people feel about their jobs.

Our relationships play an enormous part in making our lives meaningful and helping us to survive. As W. H. Auden wrote about cancer in the poem, "Miss Gee," a doctor says to his wife, "Cancer's a funny thing. Childless women get it and men when they retire. It's as if there had to be an outlet for their foiled creative fire." Jungian therapists call it growth gone wrong.

Women live longer than men with the same cancers. Does that make it remarkable? I read an article on malignant melanoma in which the oncologist suggested estrogen and progesterone must have some beneficial effect in suppressing the growth of the cancer cell. My conclusion is, then, that since married men live longer than single men with the same cancers and smoke as much but develop less cancer, that sleeping with estrogen and progesterone must be protecting them.

I am kidding of course. It is obvious from many studies and from my own patients who have cancers that having a reason for living also relates to the will to live and promotes survival. I hear men say, "I can't work anymore. What's the point of living?" while their families are sitting next to them. In contrast, women commonly say to their children, "I can't die till you're all married and out of the house." One of my patients said just that, and died of her cancer twenty-three years later when her ninth kid left home. She, like the men, needs to live an authentic life and not just a role as the wage earner or mother.

Recent studies show that loneliness affects the genes that control immune function and leads to an increased incidence of cancer, infections and autoimmune diseases. This may explain a portion of the observations on longer survival of people with cancer when they have good social supports.

### **Examples of people with remarkable recoveries from my practice**

The first is a woman who lived in North Carolina and was told by her doctor that going to Duke University Hospital for chemotherapy was a waste of time and energy, as she was going to die anyway of cancer. Her niece was caring for my father-in-law at the time and, without asking me, told her aunt, "Doctor Siegel helps people to get well all the time. Come up here to Connecticut."

When she arrived and I was called to see her, I admitted her to the hospital and found she had leukemia. As a surgeon I had nothing to offer her, so I called an oncologist to see her. He basically said what her doctor back home had said, but started chemotherapy to give her some hope. She responded dramatically and went into complete remission. His last letter to me, with a smile said, "Isn't chemotherapy wonderful." Her niece later told me she went home and was driving her doctor crazy. She told her niece she had known she would get well when I sat on her bed and hugged her.

The second, Jordan Fieldman, was a Harvard medical student who developed visual problems many years ago and was diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumor. He underwent surgery and woke up blind. He was told he would be blind for the few months he had left to live. A week later, his sight returned and he went to the medical library to research his disease. He reported that every book said that with his type of cancer, recurrence is invariable and death occurs within a year. Now, a good student would have gone home and died but Jordan was not a "good" student. He said, "How dare they say invariable?"

Jordan also suffered from ulcerative colitis and noticed that when he decided to change his lifestyle and not die of a brain tumor, his colitis also responded. He combined traditional medical therapy with other modalities and his tumor never recurred.

The third, John Florio, was retiring, at age 70, as a landscaper and developed an ulcer. When it didn't heal, a biopsy revealed carcinoma of the stomach. When John came to my office I told him we needed to get him right into the hospital, "No, you forgot something. It's springtime. I am going home to make the world beautiful. So if I die, I'll leave a beautiful world." Several weeks later, he returned and I performed surgery, which could not cure his problem due to the extent and spread of his cancer. I told him he needed more therapy and he said, "You forgot something. It is still springtime. I am going home to make the world beautiful so when I die I will leave a more beautiful world."

To make a long story short, John returned to my office four years later. I thought he was dead since he had not come back for any follow-up visits. He had two complaints, "I have a hernia from lifting boulders in my landscape business, and can I eat whatever I want to now?" I fixed his hernia. John became my therapist and taught me about the beauty of life. He died at age ninety-four with no sign of cancer.

Fourth was a woman who came to my office to have me document her healing with God's help. I told her it was hard to be a saint and I suggested she let me remove the cancer and let God keep her well. She was enraged at my suggestion and left the office. Eight years later, after lecturing in New York City, she walked up to me and said, "Do you remember me?" I said "No." Then she explained and I told her I was glad to meet a saint.

A fifth was a patient with a pancreatic cancer who went home to die and returned to my office several months later with no palpable tumor mass and feeling well. Her comment, "I went home and left my troubles to God."

A sixth case is that of Susan Duffy, who was diagnosed with generalized Scleroderma decades ago and told what would happen to her. Like many others with that disease, she was expected to have thickening of her skin and sclerosing of various tissues and organs in her body. She came from an extremely dysfunctional family, in which everyone was self destructive – in essence, to the point of committing suicide either directly or through abusing or neglecting themselves. Susan's perceptions of them were that they were telling her, "We don't love you enough to want to live, and her parents, in effect, were asking her to do herself in as well. Well, thirty years later she is still kicking and doing very well despite her disease. She has found God. "I had no control over the parents who raised me but when I let love into my prison, it changed every negative item in it, meaning the experiences in my life, and turned them into something meaningful."

## **Discussion**

Our attitudes, mind and body are one. Medical students are never told that decades ago Carl Jung interpreted a dream and correctly diagnosed a brain tumor. Bruno Klopfer deceived a patient into health when that patient had cancer and was in a study of an experimental drug called Krebiozen. The man had far-advanced lymphosarcoma with tumors the size of oranges in his neck, armpits, groin, chest and armpits. He had already exhausted all known treatments and was expected to die of his disease. The man had responded dramatically to the Krebiozen but when the reports came out after six months saying the drug didn't seem beneficial, he regressed. Klopfer then told him a new supply of super-refined Krebiozen was coming and he waited a week to build the man's intention and then gave him a saline injection. and his tumor melted away. A year later, the final research report concluded Krebiozen was of no use in the treatment of cancer and the man died within a week of learning this.

Oncologists started a new protocol with four drugs and called it the EPOH protocol using the first letters of the four drugs. One doctor noticed that if you turned it around it spelled HOPE and he started calling it the HOPE protocol. He had three times the success rate with exactly the same treatment, compared to the other doctors who used EPOH.

Another oncologist in Chicago said he noticed that patients who lived over fifteen miles from the hospital did far better than those who lived near the hospital when he started a new protocol. That is similar to people who respond to trips to various parts of the world to see healers or go to shrines. It is their belief and expectation, built up and enhanced by the challenges of travel to distant places, which play a role in the result and not necessarily the treatment. To quote physicist Fred Alan Wolf, "Desire and attention alter the physical world, causing things to occur which would not normally occur if they were not desired." And a secretary at an alternative clinic in Mexico said to me that she could tell by their attitude who was going to do well when people arrived and checked in.

Yes, there is "intentional reversion." That is a term a botanist used describing how plants alter their genes to survive climate changes and disease. So do bacteria and viruses because the mechanism is built into them so they will survive. Bacteria make intelligent genetic changes to survive antibiotics and some even learn to digest antibiotics as food in time.

The challenge for us is to create the state that lets such transformations happen, as humans have a far more complicated life than bacteria, viruses and plants. Monday is no threat to these simple organisms. The key lies in words Solzhenitsyn shares in his book, "Cancer Ward." He had cancer and so is a native and not a tourist. The men are sitting around the ward and one reads from a book he found in the hospital library:

"It says here that there are cases of self induced healing. Not recovery through treatment but actual healing, see." It was as though self induced healing had fluttered out of the great open book like a rainbow colored butterfly for them all to see and they all held up their foreheads and cheeks for its healing touch as it flew past. It was only the gloomy Podduyev who with a hopeless and obstinate expression on his face croaked out, "I suppose for that you need to have a clear conscience."

There is the essence of the story, in symbolic form, behind remarkable recoveries. From my work with patient's dreams and drawings I understand his message. The butterfly is the symbol of transformation. The caterpillar dissolves away and the butterfly is created and must struggle to break free from its cocoon. The various colors symbolize your emotions and so when your life is in order and your feelings in harmony you are transformed and heal. The essence is age-old. It is about being born again. Religions and myths show us the benefit of that act. From baptism to picking a new name for yourself, changing who we are by giving up the untrue self imposed upon us by others can be life saving.

Paradoxically, he who seeks to save his life, if it is the life imposed upon him, will lose his life, while he who is willing to lose his life by eliminating what is imposed and killing him, will save it. Twin sisters do not get the same disease at the same time. The good little girl who pleases Mom and Dad and internalizes anger is far more likely to develop cancer than her independent twin. From my experience, I know that teenagers are into suicide because they do not understand we need to eliminate what is killing us and not ourselves. One study revealed 70% of high school students have considered suicide. They have no trouble writing suicide notes for homework but a lot of trouble writing love notes about themselves.

So what is the answer to the question, "How can we achieve remarkable recoveries?" We know from studies that actors alter their immune function and cortisol levels related to whether they are in a comedy or tragedy. We see this every winter on Broadway when actors drop out due to the flu when in *Death of a Salesman* but not when in *The Producers*. The answer then is to act and behave as if you are the person you want to be and for doctors to teach survival behavior, reparent the unloved and coach their patients in that endeavor. The inspired will always exceed expectations. I know from experience.

I close with an interesting thought that Ernest Holmes, the founder of Religious Science and Science of Mind mentioned: What if Jesus was the only normal person who ever lived? Think about that and realize the potential we might all have. Most of us feel inadequate and so hope to be normal in the sense of feeling better about ourselves and similar to other people. But what if "normal" really allows us to accomplish incredible things and remarkable recoveries? I can accept this even though I don't have all the scientific answers because I do know our genes do not make decisions. Geneticist Bruce Lipton discusses this in his book *The Biology of Belief*. Genes are stimulated into activity by their environment and the messages they get; this is called epigenetics.

So be born again into a new life you love and watch what happens to your body, since it loves you and wants you to live the life you love. Remember to be what you is and not what you aint. 'Cause if you is what you aint you aint what you is.

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**Bernie Siegel, MD**, who prefers to be called Bernie, not Dr. Siegel, was born in Brooklyn, NY. He attended Colgate University and Cornell University Medical College. He holds membership in two scholastic honor societies, Phi Beta Kappa and Alpha Omega Alpha and graduated with honors. His surgical training took place at Yale New Haven Hospital, West Haven Veteran's Hospital and the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. He retired from practice as an assistant clinical professor of surgery at Yale of general and pediatric surgery in 1989 to speak to patients and their caregivers.

In 1978 he originated Exceptional Cancer Patients, a specific form of individual and group therapy utilizing patients' drawings, dreams, images and feelings. ECaP is based on "carefrontation," a safe, loving therapeutic confrontation, which facilitates personal lifestyle changes, personal empowerment and healing of the individual's life. The physical, spiritual and psychological benefits which followed led to his desire to make everyone aware of his or her healing potential. He realized exceptional behavior is what we are all capable of.

Bernie, and his wife and coworker Bobbie, live in a suburb of New Haven, Connecticut. They have five children and eight grandchildren. Bernie and Bobbie have co-authored their children, books and articles. Their home with its many children, pets and interests resembled a cross between a family art gallery, museum, zoo and automobile repair shop. It still resembles these things, although the children are trying to improve its appearance in order to avoid embarrassment.

In 1986 his first book, *Love, Medicine & Miracles* was published. This event redirected his life. In 1989 *Peace, Love & Healing* and in 1993 *How To Live Between Office Visits* followed. He is currently working on other books with the goal of humanizing medical education and medical care, as well as, empowering patients and teaching survival behavior to enhance immune system competency. Bernie's realization that we all need help dealing with the difficulties of life, not just the physical ones, led to Bernie writing his fourth book in 1998 *Prescriptions for Living*. It helps people to become aware of the eternal truths and wisdom of the sages through Bernie's stories and insights rather than wait a personal disaster. He wants to help people fix their lives before they are broken, and thus not have to become strong at the broken places. Published in 2003 are *Help Me To Heal* to empower patients and their caregivers and *365 Prescriptions For The Soul*, in 2004 a children's book about how difficulties can become blessings, *Smudge Bunny*, in 2005 *101 Exercises For The Soul* and out in the Fall of 2006 a prescriptions for parenting book *Love, Magic & Mud Pies*. Published in 2008 *Buddy's Candle*, for children of all ages, related to dealing with the loss of a loved one, be it a pet or parent, and to be published in 2009 *Faith, Hope & Healing* with survivor stories and my reflections about what they teach us. His web site is [www.BernieSiegelMD.com](http://www.BernieSiegelMD.com).

Woody Allen once said, "If I had one wish it would be to be somebody else." Bernie's wish was to be a few inches taller. His work has been such a growth experience that he is now a few inches taller. His prediction is that in the next decade the role of consciousness, spirituality, non-local healing, body memory and heart energy will all be explored as scientific subjects.

For many, Bernie needs no introduction. He has touched many lives all over our planet. In 1978 he began talking about patient empowerment and the choice to live fully and die in peace. As a physician, who has cared for and counseled innumerable people who's mortality has been threatened by an illness, Bernie embraces a philosophy of living and dying that stands at the forefront of the medical ethics and spiritual issues our society grapples with today. He continues to assist in the breaking of new ground in the field of healing and personally struggling to live the message of kindness and love.

**Contact:**

<http://www.ecap-online.org/home.htm>  
[www.BernieSiegelMD.com](http://www.BernieSiegelMD.com)



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