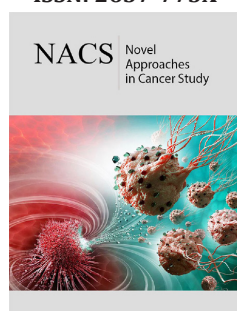


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Terminal Cancer: A Means to True Contentment

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Opinion

No one who enjoys life wants it to end. Yet it must end, and the time of that end comes closer with each passing moment. Healthy people ignore this reality. They live as if life were unending. Hence the shock when such people acquire a cancer diagnosis. Suddenly, the end intrudes, for a bit. But most cancers are cured, and this fact empowers most cancer patients, once again, to hide from reality. They return to living life as usual.

Regrettably, life as usual is bad for our planet and for all who seek to live upon it. Life as usual is the cause of climate change and economic disparity and the consequent threats to the continued survival of our species. To have any chance at fixing these problems and saving our species from extinction, an unusual way of life will have to become routine. Terminal cancer imposes such an unusual way upon its patients. They can't ignore their own mortality, even if they try. So, the transient material goals, e.g., fame, money, power, that direct normal life, and cause global warming and economic disparity, no longer carry weight. Terminal patients are looking for lasting, spiritual, value, i.e., truth. But this is precisely what everyone seeks. Normal people just get distracted by the superficial pleasures of transient material goals. And when most people pursue superficial goals, such pursuit becomes the norm. Terminal cancer is an opportunity to break free and replace superficial goals with lasting spiritual ones. The ordeal of terminal cancer can help patients and all who share their ordeal, find their way to what everyone really wants, i.e., true contentment. And by providing this help, terminal patients can find meaning in their misery. They become society's unsung heroes.

But it's not an easy transition from pursuing the transient, material norm to pursuing lasting, spiritual value. Being labeled terminal is like having the rug pulled out from under you. Shock and depression are inevitable. Nothing makes sense. Terminal patients are frantic for realistic hope. At first this hope is for cure. They want the rug back underneath them. And without that, it's impossible for them to progress to the lasting spiritual goal. But oncologists offer no realistic hope for cure. By definition, there is no such hope for terminal patients. That's why they're terminal. There's nothing for them with curative potential. And this is the crux of their misery. But it's iatrogenic misery, for the correct conclusion concerning a patient who has exhausted all conventional curative options is that no conventional curative options remain. Unconventional options with curative potential abound. Nutrient deficient diets can be crafted in countless variations, each of which has curative potential, and all of which are convenient, inexpensive, relatively safe, and requiring no regulatory approval [1].

Once a terminal patient has realistic hope of cure, they are free to struggle with the reality that even this hoped-for cure is transient. In the end, death always wins. And the whole terminal scenario must play out again. People who are in the ordeal, or have been through it, can know that the only true contentment comes from permanence, and the only permanence is spiritual.

By definition, truth is that which does not change. You can see it in the laws of nature. Objects float if they displace a weight of water greater than their own, and sink if they don't. This law of buoyancy applies always and everywhere, yet this law has no weight or volume, i.e., it is spiritual, as are all the laws of nature. They're made of nothing but they rule all matter and energy.

No two laws have ever been found to be contradictory. All laws fit together like pieces of a puzzle. We can't yet see the big picture, but we can know it's there, and we can know we're part of that picture if we are true. But what else could we be? We are true or false. There are no other options. But the false is an illusion, so it doesn't really exist. To be is to be true. And if we are that, we are like the laws of buoyancy and gravity and electricity, etc., the same now as forever, the same here as everywhere, the same for me as for everyone. We suffer because we don't see our self as true. We mistake the brain for self, and each brain is unique and transient, and terrified of death. But death wins eventually, and each brain dies. True self, however, must be as immortal, universal, and spiritual as the laws of nature.

Just as the eye detects the light, our brain detects truth. And just as death of the eye leaves light undisturbed, so does death of the brain leave truth undisturbed. We think we're our brain, but the brain is an illusion of self. True self must be as immortal and universal as true anything, and the same for everyone as true buoyancy, true gravity, and true everything is the same for everyone. The individual self is an illusion. Love others as self (Lev. 19:18), because that's what they are. We learn this by sharing rather than competing.

No one wants terminal cancer, and no one with terminal cancer wants to be abandoned or pitied. There's always some variation of nutrient deprivation that empowers a legitimate fight for life no matter how advanced the cancer. But terminal patients can know better than most that even if they win that fight, victory is only temporary. Death always wins in the end, and that renders fame, money, and power irrelevant. In the end, it's how you loved that matters. By pulling the rug out from under our usual way of life, terminal cancer empowers patients, and all who care for them, to reject the usual for an unusual way of life that can set us free of fear, and the selfishness and greed that threaten the very existence of our species.

Fetuses resist being born. Some have to be pulled out by force. But, once out, few want to return to the womb. They seem to enjoy their new view of reality. I suspect the next transition will be similar. We'll fight it, but once out, I suspect we'll like the view. It will be a truer view. Of this I'm certain, and we can prepare for it by loving more, competing less, thinking better, giving more, taking less, and embracing equity [2]. For all the misery it brings, terminal cancer fosters this preparation. Let's help the patients help us all become what we most want to be.

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