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It's Never Too Late To Get in Shape – Even After a Cancer Diagnosis

EVANSTON, IL – Generally, people diagnosed with cancer don't ask their physicians whether or not they are physically, nutritionally, or mentally fit enough to undergo treatment. But they should. Cancer treatment is so physically and psychologically debilitating that nearly 33 percent of patients undergoing chemotherapy quit before completing the regimen.

A study published in the August 16, 2006 issue of the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* drove this point home recently by reporting that in clinical trials the side effects of chemotherapy are woefully underreported. This translates into a devastating outcome for patients undergoing real-world cancer treatment, where they are experiencing more complications than estimated during clinical trials. Anemia, dehydration, malnutrition, infection, fever, reduced white blood cell counts are among the adverse side effects that the authors of the article cite as reasons women undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer visited emergency rooms. And for each month of chemotherapy the odds of experiencing a serious side effect increased by 20% per month of chemotherapy administered after initial breast cancer diagnosis. Is it any wonder so many patients simply drop out of treatment?

“It is far more common to find a patient exhausted from chemotherapy than to exhaust all the available treatment options,” explains Keith I. Block, MD, Medical/Scientific Director of the Block Center for Integrative Cancer Treatment who, with his wife Penny, developed a Cancer Rehab program that gets patients in shape before, during and after their rigorous cancer treatments.

“Just as a surgeon would prefer a patient be as nutritionally, physically and psychologically fit as possible before undergoing surgery, it follows that a physician treating cancer would want the same for their patients,” Dr. Block says. “The stronger the patient, the better chance they have of withstanding the treatments used to fight their disease.”

In order to offer each patient the treatment best suited to their needs, the Block Center uses a series of diagnostic tests that identify a person's “molecular fingerprint.” Since each patient's biology is dynamic and continually changing, treatment options are continuously reviewed and altered based on each patient's most current diagnostic information. Along with an individualized program of chemotherapy, Cancer Rehab is designed around this molecular fingerprint, with the goal of optimizing each patient's fitness level so that they are up to the challenges chemotherapy often presents.

By structuring a program that includes the proper nutritional program and supplements to offset such side effects, and a fitness program that may include aerobics, weight training, meditation, Tai chi, yoga, or stretching exercises, plus the psychological support and counseling to get through treatment, many of these side effects can be minimized, or avoided altogether. And because poor nutrition and lack of exercise are among the controllable risk factors for preventing a recurrence of cancer, BCICT doesn't abandon patients once their chemo regimen is completed.

“Cancer Rehab offers cancer survivors a personalized, active plan to regain control of their health, restore vitality, and avoid recurrence,” Dr. Block explains. “We work with patients who are sent home, and deemed ‘in remission.’ Despite the positive implications of that phrase, the disconnect from care is unsettling to a patient, often prompting feelings of anxiety and fear. In addition patients may also have chronic fatigue, and other physical and emotional challenges. Cancer Rehab offers an ongoing support system that improves survivorship by providing a long term, proactive strategy for moving on with their lives.”

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The Block Center for Integrative Cancer Treatment, located in Evanston, Illinois, was founded in 1980 by Penny and Keith Block, MD. The Center's research-based treatment integrates an innovative approach to the best of conventional medicine with scientifically sound complementary therapies – therapeutic nutrition, botanical and phytonutrient supplementation, prescriptive exercise, and systematic mind-body strategies – to enhance the recovery process.

Dr. Block is Director of Integrative Medical Education at the College of Medicine at the University of Illinois, Chicago, and a member of the National Cancer Institute's PDQ Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) Editorial Board in Bethesda, MD,. The Block Center regularly participates in industry-sponsored clinical trials of new drugs, large-scale drug monitoring studies, and research on medical communication and patient perception. The Center's research staff has participated in laboratory and clinical research projects with investigators from a number of universities and clinical centers, including the University of Illinois at Chicago, Bar-Ilan University in Israel, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, and the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. The Block Center is currently the only private North American medical center using chronomodulated chemotherapy.