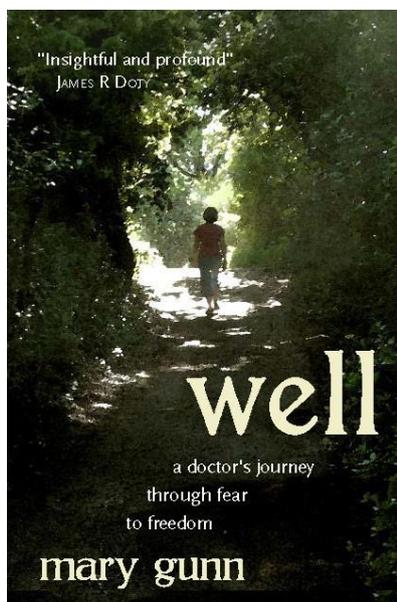


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BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



Well. A doctor's journey through fear to freedom (2017)

Gunn M.

Edinburgh: Saraband, 2017.

xx, 266pp.

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Average star rating 4.2 (out of 5)

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This is a very thoughtful account of one woman's experience of having breast cancer, and how she responded to this diagnosis and to having cancer treatment. The author discusses her experience as a doctor diagnosed with breast cancer, how her cancer recurred years later, and how she sought support to live with incurable cancer. She describes the fear she experienced when first diagnosed and when cancer recurred, and she explains how the support and wisdom of others helped her to overcome her fear. She explores spiritual issues, such as how to come to terms with living with advanced cancer, and she discusses the guidance of spiritual teachers who helped her to move beyond fear and find acceptance of her life circumstances.

The author writes very openly about the challenges she had to face, and this could really help other people with cancer to feel that they are not alone. The book gives a deep insight into one woman's experience of how it felt to be diagnosed with cancer, and, in particular, how she coped with overwhelming fear. It could especially be of help to someone who has a recurrence of breast cancer and is living with incurable illness. The author explores ways of thinking differently about her experiences, and she describes how changing her thoughts helped her to manage fear and find a sense of peace. She explains that we all have the power to change how we look at our lives, and she discusses how spiritual teachings and practices such as mindfulness can help in coming to terms with illness.

In the first section of the book, the author talks about her own experiences in some depth. We learn that she is a doctor and has worked in Africa as well as in the UK. She writes very well, and the reader is given a good insight into her family life and professional work; this provides a real understanding of the author's experiences. She talks about her initial diagnosis and her treatment – surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. She then discusses how cancer recurred years later; it is incurable, and she writes about having to consider her own death. The second part of the book is called “Changing perspectives”, and the author explains that how we think about life affects how we respond to life events. She explores how to look at our own thinking, and how to think and act in ways that can lessen suffering and promote wellbeing. This part of the book gives the reader practical advice (such as meditation advice) and philosophical guidance from different spiritual traditions. The author writes beautifully about compassion for oneself and for others and discusses people who have shown great compassion in their lives.

The book has a beautiful cover picture, painted by the author. The text inside looks appealing, and subtitles help to break it up. The author's tone is very compassionate, and she writes in such an open and warm style that the reader can feel she is communicating with us as a friend. It is very well-written and easy to understand.

The author gives an open and honest account of her experiences. She talks about many aspects of her life as well as her cancer and treatment, such as having to cope with a bereavement, worrying about her children, and the kindness and support of her family and friends. I like how she includes some of her father's poetry, and other poetry too, showing how creative works can help us in times of sadness and stress. I also like how she explores fundamental questions, such as how to live with fear and uncertainty, how to change how we view our lives, and how to find acceptance when faced with incurable illness.

I really like the author's compassionate care for others – family, friends, patients – and the gratitude she expresses for the good things about her life. She explores challenging topics like feeling fearful, and reflecting on the end of life, and yet her book expresses profound joy and thankfulness for the positive things she has experienced. She writes about having been inspired and deeply helped by spiritual teachers and other great thinkers, scientists and poets, such as Gandhi, Albert Einstein, and Rumi, and includes quotes from scientists and from teachers of many religious traditions.

The author describes in particular how much she benefited from the wisdom of spiritual teachers at a Buddhist monastery. I really like how she brings together quotations from scientists, poets, and teachers from different traditions. She discusses spiritual issues in a way that could appeal to people from a religious background, or to those with no religious beliefs. Her writing style is very inclusive, and her book will appeal to anyone who wishes to explore the deeper questions about how to lessen suffering and promote wellbeing. It is very good to read a book that brings health, illness and spirituality together so well.

There's some text about spiritual awakening at the end of Part 2 which is very interesting, and it would have been good to understand this a bit more; perhaps this section could have been a little longer.

I may recommend it. It will depend on the person's circumstances and interests. The author discusses cancer recurrence many years after her initial diagnosis, so the reader needs to be prepared that recurrence and issues around facing the end of life are discussed. Also, it will appeal to someone who is interested in how we can change our thinking about our lives, who is interested in exploring the deeper questions about life: how wisdom from spiritual teachers and other great thinkers can help us to manage fear, suffering, and to find some acceptance and peace.

Nurse (36-45) (February 2019)

This excellent book provides facts, information, and emotional and spiritual support. It will be an asset to anyone looking for a different path and ways of coping with their disease, or whatever health problems they have. It is full of insights into 'why me'.

I found it very easy to understand and very readable. There is a logical order to her story and then a help section. It's just the right length to read a bit each night and get something from it. It needs to be read in short bursts as there is a lot to take in. At first, I thought the cover a bit dull. However, now I have read the book, I see its significance, and find it inspiring. The language and tone are intimate, and I was immediately drawn into her story. As I do not usually like autobiographies, I was surprised how much I enjoyed this and how much it helped me.

I like everything about this book. I was waiting for a major heart operation while reading it, and it was a wonderful spiritual support just when I needed it. Changing my attitude to many problems helped to keep me calm and cope better. It is for anyone undergoing a major health trauma. They may feel lonely because no one understands or may just need a helping hand on the way. Mary reaches out to you and makes you feel there is a reason for how you feel, why you feel it and what you can do about it. I have already recommended it to the wonderful hospital chaplain – I am not a religious person, but more seeking spiritual guidance. I was a scared person before I read this book, now I feel I can cope and there is a way forward.

**Breast cancer patient, finding alternatives to conventional treatment (66-75)
(October 2018)**

This is not a “how to” book but it explores ways of coming to terms with cancer and gives hope that we can all find a way through our fear to live again. The cover photo is poignant.

Anyone affected in some way by cancer would find it useful to a degree, but it is focused on the personal journey of the author through her life with cancer. She has concentrated on the mental and emotional aspects of living with cancer and has done so in a very accessible and practical way. It would be most useful in coming to terms with, and moving past, the fear associated with the disease.

It is well written in everyday language and draws you in until you can't put it down. It is logical in its treatment of the main topic, although there is some jumping back and forth in a chronological sense. Some people may have difficulty with the extent of complementary/alternative treatments discussed, but they are always discussed alongside conventional treatments.

This is autobiographical and yet it's my story too. There is much that I (and I'm sure many readers) can identify with and take away to use. And while the author has an incurable diagnosis, there is much here to benefit us all.

Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (October 2018)

This is a detailed account by a general practitioner of a long-term journey through the experience of breast cancer. The author describes how she has learned to cope mentally with her diagnosis, which eventually becomes incurable. She takes us through her discovery of mindfulness techniques and meditation and her quest to learn how to deal with her illness and mortality. The alternative views of how to love with a life-threatening or life-limiting illness are a revelation and offer an alternative way of moving forward for anyone in this position.

It is a straightforward account. Her illness and search for help are described chronologically. I found no obvious inaccuracies. The author is a highly intelligent individual, academically and emotionally. She comes across as a warm and thoughtful individual whose concerns for the impact of her illness on her family are obvious. She comes across much more as a human being than a doctor. She does take rather a long time to make her point in the second half of the book. This is her right, as it is her story, but, for a reader who might not be at their best, it may prove a bit demanding, lengthwise. In view of the optimistic view expressed, I would like to have seen a less dark version of the cover illustration; the content of the image is fine, but the colouration is a little gloomy.

This is a thought-provoking read. The author's experiences and changes in her approach to life are enlightening. I love the alternative way of looking at life, illness and mortality that it presents. Western society offers little help with approaching these heavy issues, particularly for those who have no religious beliefs. It offers a view point which is palatable and accessible. It gives you chance to understand the author as a person and to see how her opinions are revised by time and experience. It is easy to identify with her concerns and fascinating to see how she concludes that she can live with cancer and still be happy and fulfilled. An uplifting read. The offer of an alternative ethos for dealing with one's illness and mortality may well be incredibly comforting to many people. It gives a very interesting perspective.

I am a healthcare professional who was diagnosed with stage 1b adenocarcinoma and treated by surgery alone earlier this year. I have just started work again (56-65) (September 2018)

This is not only the author's story but also a significant exploration of philosophical aspects of life and death; it could be useful to all. Another important aspect is that the author, who trained as a medic and is sceptical, challenges her preconceptions. These debates may help many people to challenge their views; the insight or perspective gained may allow for the open mindedness that the author advocates.

It is a holistic book as it is very openminded and approaches not just the topic of cancer, but life. It deals specifically with certain aspects of cancer, but in later sections addresses psychological and philosophical issues; this is useful to anyone affected by cancer, possibly even anyone in general. Overall, it is optimistic and addresses many concerns, doubts and even regrets, that people may have. Its approach makes it applicable to almost all aspects of living with cancer.

It is organised logically into three sections, each having structure and addressing a separate topic: the first is the journey from the author's perspective in chronological

order; the second being several psychological and philosophical viewpoints drawn from various people all tied together and contextualised, not just to cancer but to life and death in the 21st century; the third is a summary and some additional points. Overall, it is well structured and the topics flow logically and are covered sufficiently. I did not notice any factual inaccuracies. References to sources are organised in the order in which they appear. There is no glossary, but the book is easy to understand, and the language is appropriate for all audiences. A few drugs are mentioned but they are sufficiently explained in the context of the scenarios described.

The book is appealing and although it doesn't include images, the layout is straightforward and easy to follow in an appropriate size of text. The tone varies throughout the journey and the feeling is quite compassionate; the emotional setting is a tone of perseverance as well as hope. The book includes poetry, which is used imaginatively to invoke a sensation of nostalgia at times, at others to convey the varying feelings that the author has about the topics she addresses. The later topics are presented in simple ideas so as not to immerse the reader too quickly.

I like the fact that the book is divided into clear sections, building clarity after giving the context of the information it is trying to convey – each section has a clear conclusion of the information that the author is attempting to present. I enjoyed having my preconceptions and viewpoints challenged; the author does this well and frequently. The book is informative and openminded and the author is not afraid to be honest or frank with themselves and the reader, which I found refreshing. The poetry at times is strongly linked to the topics and conveys the messages that the author is trying to get across. At times, some of the poetry or opinions evoke strong imagery, which is meant to be thought provoking, but at the same time most topics are balanced, as well as from different perspectives. I enjoyed the book entirely due to its holistic approach that almost dismisses the specificity of the disease; this makes the book an experience that can be tied in with any illness or life experience. I also like that the topics are well researched, and most have links to further reading.

Overall this book was enjoyable due to its thought-provoking nature and holistic approach to issues of life and death. However, it does explore many topics that are linked to real events and, at times, the author unilaterally presents her views, which can be contrary to the reader or appear extreme. Although she covers most topics comprehensively, some could have been discussed more in the context in which they are presented. Some topics feel insufficiently explored and the journey at times can seem rushed, only to be analysed later in the context of the author's insights.

I recommend it. It is useful because it is informative and a source of hope; overall it is an enjoyable story and challenges our preconceptions. It offers meaningful insight and demonstrates that, sometimes, perspective is all that needs to change. It also explores lateral thinking, which some may not have thought of beforehand.

Close relative of cancer patients, Carer, Health care assistant looking after patients with cancer (18-25) (February 2018)

For me what's most special about this book is that, while it's inspired by a woman who has breast cancer, its wisdom could speak to anyone. It shows the way a cancer diagnosis can profoundly change your view of the world. This echoed deeply with me as well as with some family and friends who were touched by my cancer journey. It is different from most other books I've read about cancer, delving deeply into what it means to be alive and how we can live less fearfully and more joyfully with, and without, cancer. It will be useful for anyone who finds themselves looking for answers to the big questions that diagnosis raises. It offers many insights and practical tools that the author has explored in her searching, such as Buddhism, poetry, homeopathy, nutrition, Christianity, the natural world and meditation.

The book is in three parts. The first is the author's story and her realisation that she wanted to find help to transform her fear into living joyfully, despite her cancer returning. The second is about the many different practices, places, writings, and people that helped her. The third helps the reader to reflect gently on what they may find useful on their own journey towards living more freely. It is beautifully written, with many lovely quotes from poems, scriptures and teachers. There are references and a useful list of books for further reading at the end. It's a nicely produced paperback and I especially love the title, which the author explains at the start.

Its realism and positivity shine through, and it is an immensely reassuring read. The author does not flinch from describing her fear and her struggle to find acceptance, then how she embarks on her wide searchings and gradually steps into a state of freedom and living with joy. It feels very honest and generous; you feel that she wants to help and support you to find your own way of dealing with life. She acknowledges that not everyone will feel the same response to cancer and offers the book in the hope that it might help others, possibly in unexpected ways.

It offers emotional and spiritual support, which many people touched by cancer find themselves needing (that was certainly my experience). I'd recommend it to anyone with any cancer, and anyone who has been affected by cancer; while it's inspired by someone who has cancer, it is essentially about what it means to be alive and about how to live to the fullness of that, for as long and as best we can.

Woman who has had breast cancer (46-55) (January 2018)

This book will suit almost anyone, particularly someone with a recurrence of breast cancer who wants quality of life. There is so much more than how the author learned to live with cancer; every page is full of life lessons. It is very easy to understand. The cover is beautiful and is part of the author's collection. I recommend it to anyone. The author's sincerity in delivering the lessons she learnt, at first battling and then living at peace with cancer, can really be felt. You may think that a book that teaches about life lessons will be heavy reading, but it is not. The message comes through lightly, easily and effortlessly. It is a book that you can read at any time, and you will surely be enlightened! Give this book a try and I hope you will feel the same as me!

Fourth year student doctor (18-25) (January 2018)

This is a beautifully written book about life and death, not a blog that gives practical advice on coping with treatment. There are no tips on diet or exercise. It explores the subject of feelings and coming to terms with death and living a meaningful life.

The author, Mary Gunn, had breast cancer followed by successful treatment decades before writing this book. Unfortunately, she had a recurrence. The tumour is inoperable. Seven years on, she is living a happy and meaningful life. She explains how she does this in this book. Gunn has a warm, intelligent, and engaging writing style, and is immediately likeable. As a GP, she and her husband bring much experience to their work and to their lives, not least, formerly working in a Malawian hospital where supplies were short, and lives were often lost.

The first part describes her experiences of cancer and treatment. As a GP, she finds herself receiving medical care, a humbling perspective. When cancer recurs 20 years after treatment, she is left with the knowledge that surgery is not possible and a prognosis of two years. She wrote this book seven years after this prognosis and is still living a happy and meaningful life. In the remainder of the book, she describes how she has done this. She explores the fact that we all die. Most of us are in denial and live our lives as if this will not happen, but by removing the fear of death, and accepting our situation, we can gain much in terms of personal happiness and meaning of life. She gets much support and inspiration from Buddhist teachings, and her conversations with one leader in particular. These are no airy-fairy words; instead, there is practical honesty, warmth and contentment in these teachings. Gunn distils this wisdom into everyday language that can resonate with anyone – and the result is a generous source of kindness, support and wisdom.

I very much warmed to the author. She writes about what many would consider to be the unwritable, i.e. fear of death, acceptance. She has a warm, engaging and intelligent style of writing. She writes for people who are interested in coping with an incurable condition – not necessarily cancer. The content runs deep. It is therefore a book that must be read carefully and with concentration. But it's worth it to do so. It will be particularly useful for those who have a diagnosis of an incurable condition but also of great value to anyone, regardless of their health status.

Friend, Carer, Former Health Professional (56-65) (December 2017)



Mary Gunn's exploration into other faiths, culture and beliefs is fascinating, thought provoking and portrays refreshing attitudes that lead her to a new approach to life. She starts with her illness and the diagnosis that caused her to become more focused and realise simpler needs. She gives a vivid picture of the fears she felt when her cancer returned, likening it to a hand grenade in her chest. She discusses the normal responses to fear (flight or fight), then other responses that range around the flexibility of our brains and bodies. She suggests trying not to be fixed in our ways. Another, counter-intuitive option, is to turn in and face our inner fear, rather than pretend it's not there. She reasons that if we meet it, it changes; the world we are looking at changes, is less fear-filled.

The chapter "Finding a new normal" is pertinent and indicative of how I felt trying to get back to my own normal – returning to work with a target to get back to full time and walking 10K steps daily. I learnt that it takes a lot longer and you must accept that it won't be the same state of normal. Reading about her efforts to return to work and attempt normality made me realise how lucky I am and how much worse it could be. Another interesting lesson is Mary finding she needed help with her "state of inner watchfulness", her semi-alert, uneasy sense of waiting and wondering, a waiting for that which one most dreads, wondering "am I truly well and if so for how long". The undertow of alarmed not knowing is always there, always pulling. I like Lama Yeshe's response "I think when you are ill, you in the West suffer much more than we do. In Tibet, as soon as we are born, we know that suffering, illness and death are a part of life. To some they come early, to some late". It is a total change in how to look at it all. She found strength, steadiness and true compassion from his telling the truth. Her gaze was widened, and a quiet steadiness was revived. Once she accepted her energy levels as they were, i.e. lower than before, but good enough, she says "Peace broke out"! (with guidance from Lama Yeshe).

The theme of the second part is about looking at life from the opposite perspective. We should open the door on our fixed ways of seeing and behaving, to allow wider, kinder ways to develop. "The Door" poem illustrates this, and she discovered with delight that a wider perspective changed everything. She describes positive emotions: kindness (the Dalai Lama's religion); acceptance; tolerance; humility and humour; appreciation; patience; and compassion. These are the attitudes taught by many Eastern faiths and in mindfulness, one of the tools she recommends with meditation and yoga, to explore our minds. She tells a great story of a helpless rider on a galloping horse to show how we need to become acquainted with how our mind works; if not, the horse (our mind), will tend to take over causing suffering as well as joy. We need to take good care of our minds so that we may suffer less.

Mary is a Dr of medicine, but keeps an open mind about complementary therapies, embracing conventional medicine and homeopathy, which benefited many of her patients. She tells of patients who really seemed to start to recover due to homeopathy, and she felt gratitude for it, such that she studied it at the Glasgow Hospital and with an eminent doctor in Mumbai and included it in her own treatment.

Her purpose in writing the book is achieved in my view. She was advised by Lama Yeshe to write about how she was full of fear about the cancer and how she is without that fear now. She has written about how she found a way not to suffer and how not to make the family suffer by moving towards a deeper acceptance of the situation. Her book will be useful for many aspects of life; one is understanding some of the feelings of dependency on treatment and the anti-climax when it ends. Another is the length of recovery time needed and the management of expectations trying to get back to "normal". I like the way she learns acceptance of her condition and achieves her aim to get the best out of life at each moment in time. It will be useful for someone with an open mind. It offers very good emotional support as well as providing interesting valuable information about certain aspects of living with cancer and living with fear. I will probably recommend it; it may mean more to someone who has practised mindfulness of some sort.

Liver transplant patient (56-65) (January 2019)

This book is useful not just for patients with breast cancer but for anyone diagnosed with a terminal condition; no one can ever be prepared for such a diagnosis. Reading it reminded me of the fear I experienced and how I overcame it. It could be useful for friends and family, to help them understand what their loved one is going through. It is particularly strong around spirituality; the author is searching for answers and looking for a source of strength and how to face the challenges and cope with pain and discomfort. I was concerned that it might confuse some readers because Mary mentions her fear of the diagnosis but also mentions crises around the world and the flaws in the National Health Service.

The book is well written, sensible, and informative. It explains how to gain strength from within oneself, through diverse belief systems. I cannot comment on accuracy as I did not check or cross-reference the facts. I was disappointed with the cover; a brighter cover would be more attractive, rather than a depressing black.

I especially appreciated this book because of the sincerity and honesty of the author's feelings. It reflects the emotions of a cancer patient's experiences and challenges. I could have enjoyed it more if the author had explored further when she said that "our body is the biggest gun" and included more about a healthy diet, exercise, and change of lifestyle to help our normal cells fight the cancer cells.

In times of uncertainty and a terminal diagnosis, fear can be overwhelming. To overcome fear, one must face it holistically, in my opinion. Nourishment of the body, spiritual doubts, emotional struggle and psychological dilemma are equally important.

I will recommend it, for one must be free from fear to live life for the moment, enjoy it and appreciate it as well. This is an eye opener because many people depend on what Western medicine tells them about prognosis and treatment. Our health system focuses on pharmacology. Some may have severe side effects from conventional treatment but are not given the choice of alternative treatments. Homeopathic treatment is not available on the NHS; one must be able to afford it like Mary.

Ovarian cancer survivor (46-55) (December 2018)

This isn't a book I would pick up from the cover, but it would be helpful for anyone with, or without, cancer. Dr Gunn writes from the heart whilst talking about her family and her first diagnosis, but this is by no means a tear jerker. I could feel her strength through her actions, reactions and determination.

Fear is personal and we all react differently; the author allows us an insight into her journey, how she thought, what she learnt, where she looked for guidance and help. She chose to use half the book to describe her journey and what she found most helpful for her. I love the fact that, even though she has a background in medicine, she chose other methods such as mindfulness tools and spirituality. There are many quotes, poems, psalms and spiritual quotes from a range of sources. She truly delved deeper for herself; I'm not sure that many others have done this type of research. Even though she is a doctor, she uses appropriate language and gives explanations where necessary.

I love her honesty and reading about how she dealt with everything. I loved reading about her background and then on to her story in the first part and enjoyed this more than the rest, which is quite heavy going if you are not interested in mindfulness, for example. There are some nice poems but lots of quotes and other references to other religions. It's a personal choice and this was hers; she gives a great insight and I am sure she has opened many eyes for others to learn from her story.

Relative of someone who had cancer (36-45) (December 2018)

This book focuses on the emotional aspects of diagnosis. It is not specific to breast cancer so suitable for people with any sort of cancer. Much of the advice is useful for anyone, even without cancer. It is divided into three distinct sections. The tone is friendly and reassuring and the content easy to understand; there is little technical language as the author mainly writes about her emotional response. The cover is attractive, the paper good quality, and the typeface, font size and layout are clear and easy to read. There is a list of references at the end.

The author is insightful about the emotions around diagnosis and her book is helpful to anyone newly diagnosed, especially if their cancer is incurable; she focuses on how to accept a diagnosis. She starts off by sharing her journey, from diagnosis to recovery, then recurrence thirteen years later. She describes perfectly how one responds to initial diagnosis and finding out that one's cancer is incurable. She is honest and open throughout. The second section is more general and discusses emotional responses to difficult situations, with advice on how to live with uncertainty and fear. She draws on wisdom from a variety of sources, from neuroscientists to philosophers and Buddhist teachers. She even includes some poems by her father.

I was disappointed by the section on homeopathy. It is unscientific and misleading, which is concerning, especially as the author is a doctor; people are more likely to trust her opinion. However, I enjoyed it overall. It does not provide facts or medical advice, but the emotional support is excellent. I recommend it to people with any cancer, and to anyone who has had a life-changing experience.

Living with stage IV bowel cancer (26-35) (March 2018)

I love the feel of this book; a soft paperback with an interesting cover that does not scream cancer at you and will sit happily on a shelf in any home, library, or hospital. I looked forward to reading it as it is by a doctor with incurable cancer. She writes a balanced view of her experiences from diagnosis to now from her standpoint as a doctor, but also as a patient to explain her thoughts, ways of dealing with the cancer and what to do when she discovers that, after a recurrence, her cancer is incurable.

It is easy to understand, written well and intelligently, with no jargon. It is divided into three parts. I preferred to read about her life, diagnosis, and treatment rather than the retreats, visits to Holy people and mindfulness – I am at a stage in my illness where all this seems a waste of time. But this is just personal preference.

All in all, a useful book that does not dwell on treatment and its effects but gives a three-part account of an incurable cancer experience. The account is balanced and does not demand that you subscribe to these experiences and points of view. The author questions what she is writing and if she is trying to convert people to her way of thinking. I balked at her decision to use homeopathy but admire her as her decision was informed; examples of two patients and time spent in Africa where she saw it working. Because she writes intelligently, with reasoned arguments, this is not a “conversion”; it is simply a telling of different methods that she has tried and tested.

Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (46-55) (December 2017)



This book may be useful for helping people deal with the uncertainties, emotions and questions associated with having breast cancer. The first part is easy to understand. The explanations of diagnosis and treatment are easy to follow, and the evidence base regarding treatment and survival is explained very well. The second part is more difficult. Some chapters use many quotations, making the book flow less well.

I like the first half of the book. It is personal, includes medical knowledge that is explained very clearly, and gives interesting insights into the effects of cancer on daily life for the individual and their family. I did not like the second part overall. Although it raises some interesting questions, I found it a lot harder to read. It reads more like a separate book for people interested in mindfulness and who want to learn more about it. I read to the end because I thought there may be a chapter following on a little more on the author’s personal story, but there was not.

I might recommend it based on the first half. As I am not an advocate of mindfulness, it would be difficult for me to recommend it based on the second half, although some interesting points are raised.

Health professional working with patients and families affected by prostate cancer (36-45) (March 2019)

Anyone could read this book, it isn’t just about the author’s cancer. I found it very interesting to read about her life as a young doctor. She has made it very easy to read, with explanations and an interesting story of her life.

Although I enjoyed reading it, my opinions on life and death have not changed. I like how it is in stages, how the author tells her early life story, then her diagnosis, treatment and changing perspective but I am not into meditation, so found it difficult to read. I did try to do the exercises, but it’s not really for me. I recommend it to someone more spiritual and open to meditation.

Incurable lung cancer patient (46-55) (January 2018)

It was some time before I could pick up this book and start reading because I don't like the cover. Looking closely, I can see it is a woman walking through a dark wood towards a brighter clearing, but it looks dark, gloomy and depressing. Having read it, I may look at books on mindfulness, but I prefer more practical texts. I am sure others will find it more appealing, so I have scored it midway. It is probably most useful for someone interested in spiritual aspects and hoping to gain some answers.

It was good to learn that the author had found a form of acceptance of her situation. The author cites a lot of references and includes passages from other materials, but I was left thinking... and? I didn't find it a very practical book and found Part 2 difficult to understand. I felt like I would have to go to retreats and consultations with spiritual leaders myself to get a better understanding. Maybe I am not in the right frame of mind now to look wider for some of these answers; I am scared, but this book did not really help me with my current fears.

Living with metastatic breast cancer (56-65) (December 2018)

The first part of this book is a good read for anyone with, or caring for someone with, breast cancer – and who has an interest in Buddhism – for diagnosis, treatment and recurrence. The author is continuing to explore alternative treatments.

The cover is not appealing; it is dark and doesn't really explain itself. The content is broken down into good chapters in a logical order. There is a bibliography with details of books she has quoted from.

I can't give this book a full review as I didn't read much of the second part. I enjoyed the first half, although it is quite technical. I liked hearing how the author dealt with her cancer and her positivity about how she would cope following recurrence. The second half – explaining her journey through Buddhism – isn't as interesting. She found much peace and healing, but some of her explanations are hard to understand. I probably won't recommend it unless the reader has an interest in Buddhism.

I am caring for my husband who has bladder cancer (66-75) (November 2018)

Although this book describes recurring breast cancer, it could be relevant to anyone with cancer. It deals with some of the non-conventional aspects of accepting that you have cancer. It is easy to understand and has an interesting front cover.

I thought it would be very good as the author is a doctor and it would therefore be accurate, but the author's reason for writing it was to show how you can live with a recurrence and choose to have a happy life by accepting what is. The section on homeopathy is interesting and, even though it is not proven as such, it does make you consider it as a possibility. There is also advice that the author received from Buddhist teachers but, although I like the idea of Buddhism, this did not really resonate with me. Too much of the book is spent on this although I do get the point that it is better to try to see the positive aspects of your life than dwell on the negative. This philosophy did seem to be successful in ensuring the author continued to survive despite recurrence.

It isn't my favourite book (in the end, I became bored by the section on dealing with recurring cancer), but I do think there is a place for it in a cancer library, in that it will give hope and maybe ideas to patients who have a recurrence. It is interesting but not the best I have read on the subject, so I can't highly recommend it.

Survivor of womb cancer (66-75) (July 2018)

Further information

Why does Macmillan Cancer Support review books?

We use reviews to help us compile a list of suggested cancer books, the [Macmillan Core Book List](#). Cancer information centres and public libraries can use this list to select appropriate and relevant books for people affected by cancer.

We add reviews to the [Directory of information materials for people affected by cancer](#) so that people affected by cancer can see what others in a similar situation think about a book. You can also see details of all the books reviewed in the [Book reviews listing](#), which also has links to all the reviews.

We recruit most of our reviewers through the [Volunteering Village](#) and the [Cancer Voices Network](#), people affected by cancer who have signed up to help Macmillan Cancer Support in a number of ways. Volunteers are a vital part of our book review process; since 2007, over 1,500 Macmillan volunteers have written more than 6,000 reviews of over 500 different books.

If you are a health professional who would like to review books for us, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Information and support for people affected by cancer

If you are looking for support to help you live life with cancer, you may wish to contact one of [Macmillan's cancer information and support services](#). Or you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon-Fri 9am–8pm). We have an interpreting service in over 200 languages. Just state, in English, the language you wish to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use textphone no 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay.

You can also email us using the [website enquiry form](#). Alternatively, [visit our website](#).

Feedback

If you have any comments, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

We're here to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can, providing physical, financial and emotional support. So whatever cancer throws your way, we're right there with you.

For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk

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