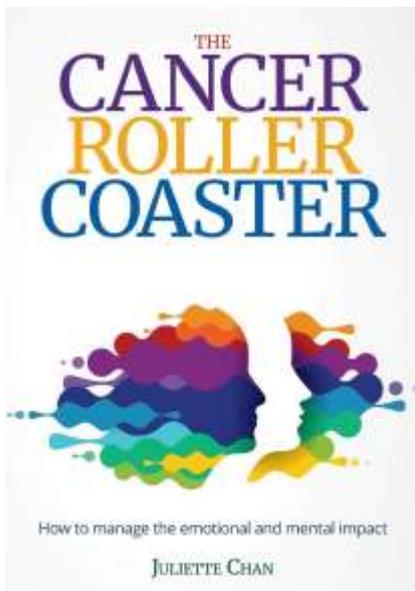


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# BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



**The cancer roller coaster. How to manage the emotional and mental impact (2019)**

Chan J.  
Librotas, 2019.  
186pp.  
ISBN 9781916489462.

**Average star rating 3.9 (out of 5)**

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This is a beautifully written work; the author has taken time to write her story and others in the same format, making it easy to understand for people who have been psychologically traumatised by their cancer journey. It is very well laid out and readable for anyone, but especially the patient. It is most useful for the richly worded stories – the author’s and others – and the exercises; it’s warm and kind to the soul.

It is very easy to understand. The order throughout is very clear, enabling the mind to be more settled, which will be very good for cancer patients. There don’t seem to be any technical terms as such, but lots of explanations about feelings and that one size does not fit all. I did not encounter any factual inaccuracies; the stories are first-hand accounts from patients and the author – a bereavement volunteer and Advanced Grief Recovery Specialist – has helped many people during her experiences, so she is well placed to write a book such as this; it is also well researched.

It is an appealing book; the lovely cover is clear, without too much text, making it easy to see what it is about. The overall quality is very good: the font is a good size; the text is well spaced out; the illustrations are clear. I love the sayings throughout. It invited me to read it as soon as I picked it up. The words in the introduction, “We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails”, are apt – we may be unable to change things, but we can adjust the way we react and live on the cancer journey.

The concept of loss and grief is a poignant reason for writing this book; these multifaceted factors affect us so much in our psychological journey through cancer. The survey (p. 10) is clear and real from my experience as a healthcare provider, and the lists on page 12 are clear and relatable. The book is written in a very holistic way covering all aspects of life. By asking the right questions, it enables patients to open up and express their feelings. In part one it talks about grief being like the ocean – in waves, ebbing and flowing; sometimes the water is calm, sometimes overwhelming, such a lovely way to express feelings. It is written in a very creative way, mostly art, but also science. When cancer patients talk about their illness it’s often in disguise and needs a good listener to pick up the real messages; this book seems to have expressed this in Part 1. Part two consists of the stories of others, all written in the same manner to make it logical and easy to read. Part three is the work book; there is lots of help to complete the exercises, or they can be done in stages, Having worked through a sample of the exercises, I found them clear and easy to follow. I’ve done lots of mind mapping and it still amazes me how much comes out randomly.

I like the examples, e.g. the brain and fight, flight, freeze (p. 21), and expressing loss as an emotional response to grief (p. 29). It gives hope and shows a way through. Grief is well considered and reaffirms our own grief loss. On page 33, the author leads on to unresolved grief, referring to it as a leaking boat; this helps us understand what is happening. The book includes mindfulness and is written with optimism and encouragement. It won't be right for everyone, but it could be very useful for many people. Reading about other people's experiences enables the reader to understand themselves and the exercises are very useful to help with that understanding.

### **Former Macmillan Nurse (66-75) (August 2019)**

This is best read during and after treatment, when you are ready to confront your feelings about cancer and what you have been through. It is easy to understand with helpful tools to work through emotional problems. The cover isn't inspiring, but the content is easy, and you can dip in rather than read it cover to cover. I enjoyed following the steps and completing the tasks. It has helped me understand my feelings better and given me tools to cope with my emotions. It can be hard to be honest with your feelings, but beneficial in the end.

### **I have had treatment for breast cancer (46-55) (August 2019)**

This covers the vital but often overlooked element of mental and emotional health associated with diagnosis, its treatment and aftermath. It is most useful for cancer patients, to understand some of the mental and emotional issues. Part 3 has useful tools to help them come to terms with their experience. It is also useful for family.

The content is in a logical order: background; case studies; practical help. I found it easy to follow but I have an academic background in biology; some may find it harder to understand. It is an appealing book, although the cover could be better; when reading in bed the book would often 'flop' as the cover is not particularly sturdy.

The biggest positive is that it deals with an area that is sadly overlooked. I suffered badly with mental health issues following my all-clear and it took me years to realise this. If I had received the correct help at the time, this could've been avoided. I would like more accounts from younger people, but this isn't a huge negative.

### **Hodgkin lymphoma and papillary thyroid cancer survivor (36-45) (July 2019)**

This book describes the emotional and mental aspects of cancer from diagnosis to end of treatment. It is therefore most useful for patients and those supporting them to understand cancer's emotional and mental impact – the psychological side effects of cancer are sadly real. You can dip in to check your feelings and work through them with the aid of the information and advice given. I like that the author experienced what she has written. Her book is real, and I could relate to so many aspects. The stories of others who faced cancer help the reader to appreciate that it is "normal" to have these fearful thoughts, feelings and sad times. The exercises are helpful and thought provoking and can be used by groups as well.

The title is of immediate interest to anyone who has had to walk the cancer path. The cover is inspirational, the paper high quality, the typeface clear, the font a good size. It is easy to understand, in warm, friendly, supportive and uncomplicated language. The author is committed to helping others face the emotional roller coaster – she speaks not only as a professional but also as a good friend.

An excellent “go-to” book for an insight into, and help on, managing the emotional and mental forces of diagnosis, treatment and thereafter. I have felt much better since reading it. It helped me when I was struggling emotionally and thought that I would never feel the same again. I will never be the same again, but when I read these words in the introduction, “We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails”, I had a Eureka moment, “that is it exactly, that is what I have to do”. The book gives confidence and inspiration. Well done, Juliette. Your book has helped me with my recovery and I am sure it will assist many others to understand the psychological steps from diagnosis to end of treatment and beyond. It has a lot of information that can be used throughout the cancer journey as required and for some time thereafter.

**Breast cancer diagnosed by routine breast screening. Lumpectomy in December 2018 followed by fifteen and a further eight targeted radiotherapy treatments. Taking prescribed medication (66-75) (July 2019).**

This book is suitable for someone with cancer to explore their journey. It can be very thought provoking. It also gives carers an idea of what the patient will be dealing with emotionally. It will help in identifying how as a patient you process your cancer journey, how you have been coping, that what you may feel works may in fact be surprising deeper emotions that will surface later and confuse you, because by then there appears to be no connection.

The cover is fresh and modern, and the paper is crisp and bright. It is clear and easy to follow and the sections flow well as they build to the active workbook at the end.

The author makes it personal because she mentions her journey – you know she understands what it is really like. She offers practical information about the emotional impact of diagnosis and onwards. She explores the emotional responses to cancer and I could identify with these. The eight stories (including hers), highlight how personal the experience is. I had not expected to find it so challenging; I had recurring emotions about many aspects and reactions to my journey that I had not identified before. This was good to see and consider. I particularly like the narrative voice, and the personal timeline is very powerful. My only dislike is that for the workbook section you must use A3 paper; it sounds picky, but I had to stick A4 pieces together. It could have been completed in an Excel spreadsheet in fact.

The timeline of events has great visual impact; it stopped me in my tracks as I could see the impact and emotional overload in those early days. One of the most useful aspects is the workbook, with exercises for moving forward. This is a book that I know I will go back to time and time again and re-do some of the exercises to explore how my emotions may have changed. A thought-provoking book and I recommend it.

**Breast cancer patient 56-65) (May 2019)**

This is most useful for patients as it contains exercises for those going through the grief associated with diagnosis and treatment. However, the narrative on the mental and emotional challenges of cancer is insightful for partners, family and friends to help them understand that the impact is much broader than the physical and medical effects of disease and treatment. Many of the people interviewed, or included in research quoted, report the loneliness of the experience once visible treatment is over. Some of the messages are significant to medical professionals – they need to understand that cancer affects the whole person and the disease and treatment are only part of the impact and solution. And that the emotional impact can happen at any time. And the end of treatment doesn't mean end of trauma or emotional impact.

The content is structured clearly, with the theory behind the emotional and mental impact of cancer and its treatment, case histories to demonstrate how everyone has a different experience, then exercises. There is clear guidance on how to complete the exercises and the time frame. The narrative is simple and compelling; it is not complicated, and you can dip in and out or skim if needed, but there is not so much content that you get lost anyway. It is not medically technical, and all elements of psychology and research conducted, and conclusions reached are simply explained. Concepts are clearly described in bite-size pieces, which is appropriate for readers hampered with lack of focus and fatigue – whether of a medical or emotional source.

I like that it is simple to read, compelling and hopeful. I like the analogy of grief as a leaky boat. There is enough technical detail, but it is mainly pragmatic. It is very understanding of the situation from an insider's perspective and the author's perspective as a grief counselling professional. It also matches the physical recovery process; it takes so much time and you need to look back a long way to see how far you've come. I found it more useful than books I've read on trauma; the experience and symptoms can be similar, but the connection to the cancer experience is not necessarily explicit. The tools are very practical, and it is reassuring that there is a treatment process to help with the mental and emotional challenges.

I read it at a very opportune time; it contains some of the key insights I gained through my treatment and physical recovery but have lost sight of in my desperation to get back to the way I was before cancer. For example: recovery takes such a long time and is unpredictable, so you must look back over a longer period than you might be used to, to see progress and this is the same for the mental journey. Another insight is that all feelings are just that and they all pass; this is very helpful in the throes of treatment when outcomes are so uncertain but is a good truth to reconnect to.

I am aware that it is a marketing tool for her practice, but she does offer her courses only as an option and includes the content of those courses as self-managed tools. A cynic might question if her profession as a grief counsellor drives her interpretation of the cancer experience as one of grief but there is a growing recognition of the mental and emotional impact of cancer, and the body of work on grief does feel useful.

**Living with leukaemia (46-55) (May 2019)**



This book would be useful to someone living with, or recovering from, cancer who is in the right place to look at themselves emotionally and physically. I am four years on from diagnosis and it brought back many of the emotions and feelings of being on that 'rollercoaster' that I had forgotten and perhaps I could have benefitted at the time. However, my partner is now facing cancer and early on in his diagnosis and would not find it helpful at this time as his emotions are too raw.

It is a timely reminder that the emotions of dealing with cancer change daily; some days you have good news and others bad, some days you don't know what to do or even how to think. This book makes that ok. Although it seems to focus on cancer in the same way as grief (not always the case) it has a positive approach and suggests several ways for readers to be in control of how to recognise and react to their emotions. It looks at the physical and the mental aspects as one, which is great.

It is easy and simple to read. The size may be a little off putting at first, but much of the content is personal stories and exercises. It is easy to dip into. An improvement might be more colour, so that the user stories and exercises are more visible.

I found the personal stories interesting, thought provoking and comforting. I like that the book focusses on the whole person – physical and mental - and sets that up well. However, cancer is not all bad news; there are many positive aspects and outcomes along the way and I would have liked to have seen more on the positives. It's a useful book for anyone on the road to recovery and trying to work through their thoughts and feelings, but I wouldn't have found it helpful at diagnosis and initial treatment.

#### **Living with breast cancer (56-65) (July 2019)**

A very useful book for anyone affected by cancer, not just patients, for all aspects of cancer – it would be good to have a copy soon after being diagnosed. It is easy to pick up and put down and go back to in a few months. It explains the grief process and takes you through the how and whys. The exercises are useful and it is great that they indicate how long they will take and the level of difficulty. The suggestions of what to do next and what to do with the exercises are good. It is also useful for healthcare professionals – I did several exercises myself.

It is easy to read. The text is simple, but not too simple; it is easy to get your head around how you feel and that this is a normal process. The book is a nice weight and the font is nice and large. At first glance, I didn't see the faces in the cover image.

A pleasing, easy book, useful and informative. It is lovely to read normal stories of patients, understand where they are coming from, and what was useful. I have passed it on to a friend currently having chemotherapy and she has found it useful.

#### **CNS Haemato-oncology (46-55) (June 2019)**

Although this is an insightful book for anyone affected by cancer, it is more useful for those going through it, or who have survived it, particularly the exercises at the end. It deals with the emotional and mental impact of cancer that can affect anyone who has anything to do with cancer in different ways. However, the case studies are predominantly cancer survivors and therefore, most of the examples relate to survivors. The exercises in Part 3 are designed for people to confront their emotions and help them move on, therefore, whilst they could be relevant for anyone at any stage in cancer, they are most suitable for those with a positive prognosis.

Part one is a very good resource for anyone who is struggling to know 'how they are supposed to feel' or trying to analyse their own feelings. It will provide that reassurance that there is no one way to feel and help people with their emotions. Part Two would also be useful in the provision of hope and for people to see that they are not alone in how they are feeling. Part Three will be useful for those who are wishing to move on and make sense of their emotion and how to deal with them.

The content is structured in a very logical manner. Part One deals with the psychological responses to grief, cancer diagnosis and emotions generally, which is very helpful for anyone and I feel that the title is spot on. Part One makes this very clear. Part Two provides some examples of real people that link into Part One and apply the theories covered in that section. Part Three takes the knowledge learned from the first two parts to describe exercises and activities that people can undertake to understand their emotions, learn from them and move on if necessary.

The title is perfect, and it covers elements of a cancer diagnosis that many will not have thought about. There is plenty of white space, the paragraphs are relatively short, and the typeface is large enough to not be daunting to a reader. The tone is empathic, and it almost feels a little like a counsellor is there with you. It is easy to understand in terms of language and examples and the author uses bullet points and boxed paragraphs to help with easy reading.

I like the tone and that it deals with important mental health issues. I like the case studies; so many readers will be able to relate to these other people and it brings the theory to life. I like how the book is structured. I can see that the exercises in Part 3 will be useful particularly to a cancer survivor or person in remission.

The author acknowledges that the input to the book has largely been from those who have gone through a cancer journey and come out the other end and therefore, there is less to relate to for anyone who may have been given a terminal diagnosis or for whom a cure is not possible. This is the only downside to the book. It would be useful to have more material for these people to relate to as their thoughts and priorities are likely to be very different. Overall, a very useful book for those who wish for some support to move on through their lives. I would have given it five stars if it also covered material for those whose outlook is not so positive.

**Family member of patient with bowel cancer (46-55) (May 2019)**

This is aimed at people who have had a cancer diagnosis and/or treatment and are unsure of how to handle the psychological impact. There is little about the impact on families or healthcare professionals – the focus is on patients – but there is plenty of general information on loss or grief as a major issue surrounding cancer, which can touch everyone involved. Chan discusses loss and grief as a response to even minor cases, as the experience is a very frightening one. Time, confidence, friendships, and jobs can be lost because of cancer; ‘loss and grief’ are not exclusive to bereavement and death. It is a helpful and eye-opening approach from which everyone can learn. What is missing, however, is stronger recognition that these losses also happen to family members/carers as they prioritise supporting the person with cancer.

The physical appeal lies in its soft-touch cover and pages. The cover colour scheme is bright – reminiscent of the spectrum of human emotion – but with a vague clinical nod in its internal and external typefaces. Line spacing and type size is appropriate to the size of the book but could be slightly small for some readers. Pages have been printed in greyscale with a small but noticeable contrast between body and title texts, which adds interest and improves the overall design. Tables are large enough to write in without a need to photocopy or copy them onto paper, but the circular Wheel of Life charts towards the end are small and it is hard to read the numbers inside.

The content is broken down into three sections and labelled clearly. There is no glossary, but any technical language is explained in layman’s terms. The author compiled data from her research as a bereavement volunteer and references it throughout. She notes that her studies aren’t as extensive as she’d like and that she would like to expand on them. Some information is presented (without statistics) as fact, however, usually in boxed areas in such a way to suggest it is from another source. Some sources are given, but not always. It would be useful for readers to know where the author found her information in case they want to investigate further.

Many of the opinions in Section 2 are directed at patients in the UK. Sections 1 and 3 are much more general and will resonate with people from other countries as there is less mention of the NHS and structures exclusive to the UK. As someone who has previously cared for two close family members with cancer, I found Section 2 gave me valuable insight into the difficulties that patients with terminal, life-threatening/life-altering and minor diagnoses face. Some patients who, for example, received a short course of radiotherapy or chemotherapy after which their results showed no further cancer, said that they felt as if they had, in a sense, ‘cheated’. There were feelings of guilt, that they were somehow frauds or fakes, and shouldn’t describe themselves as having had cancer. Other elements of this section are quite frightening in that some patients mentioned they had visited doctors and specialists on occasion and been given the all-clear before being diagnosed with higher grade cancers later. This is indicative of a lack of communication, a lack of professionalism and waning trust between patients and the doctors who serve our NHS. It is common knowledge that medical staff are being pushed to their limit and, in turn, this causes misdiagnoses and mistakes that could cost lives. Section 2 is incredibly worrying in this respect, and only reiterates that our NHS is facing crisis. Accounts from family members and carers would have opened this book up to more people; seeing yourself reflected in the stories of others is very freeing and can make you feel much less alone.

I have read many books about cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) having suffered from depression, low self-esteem and anxiety for several years, but have never seen a book that applies these techniques to specific life events. Juliette Chan has opened the broadening discussion of mental health further by examining the psychological impacts of cancer and encouraging not only patients and carers but also medical professionals to follow up treatment with mental health support. Her interviews are indicative of a growing problem in the NHS of worsening care, missed diagnoses, long waiting times and other issues, often due to persistent cuts to staff and medical services that could otherwise save or lengthen lives. It is a sad but necessary talking point that needs attention, and it is helpful for future patients to know what they could face in this respect. The interviews in Section 2 are helpful in understanding how someone with cancer might be feeling, how those emotions can change or develop, and how one might be able to support them better. The workbook is very helpful to anyone affected by cancer who is struggling with the psychological fallout. CBT techniques and practices help readers to understand what they're feeling, why they might be feeling it, and what they can do to move forwards. The author encourages readers return to their work later and so that they can reflect on their journey.

Section 1 indicates that the book is for anyone affected by cancer. As a carer for my late grandfather and mother, I found it didn't resonate. I couldn't connect to the stories in Section 2 as they are all from people with cancer, none from medical staff, carers or anyone else who may have knowledge of the experience. Such insights would be beneficial in understanding how grief and loss can impact those who support patients, rather than how only patients are affected. Section 3 is a workbook, arranged to give readers a starting point, the opportunity to reflect on past and present problems, to create plans and to respond to how those plans are forming later. It is not meant to be completed in a short time; the author encourages readers to return to it over weeks or months. There is much emphasis on identifying losses and planning, which, for patients and carers facing loss, could be useful. However, the language is not inclusive of those who have not had cancer and there are no examples for carers to use as starting points when doing the exercises. Although anyone can complete Section 3, these issues may cause some readers to tune out or find it hard to make connections, and therefore not complete the book or exercises.

Cancer is a disease that impacts one not just physically, but also psychologically. There are no notable books I have found that explore this topic and use CBT techniques to improve people's wellbeing when facing cancer. This book is an initial, but very important, step in improving cancer care.

### **Family member and carer (26-35) (May 2019)**

I like the design of this book and it is very easy to read. The patients' stories are very interesting and cover all aspects of the physical and mental effects of cancer. They are also of some comfort. I can relate to their thoughts and feelings and they made me feel that I was not alone and not going mad! I have worked through the exercises and found them extremely helpful to put my journey and mental state in some order.

Tony (p. 77), states that if the cancer had grown through the bowel wall and infected the lymph glands he would not be here now. My cancer grew through the bowel wall and affected three lymph nodes (having had over sixty removed from my abdomen). I was told that it wasn't significant as post-operative chemo would kill remaining cancer cells. I had no worries about this until I read his story. This is now a significant worry. I will check with my oncologist, but I am concerned that this is not true.

**Bowel cancer with metastatic spread into lymph nodes. Surgery in 2016 and now under surveillance. My gastroenterologist is helping me through post-operative problems associated with digestion (46-55) (April 2019)**

This looks how cancer affects people mentally. It is useful for patients, partners, family, and friends. I recommend it for health professionals. The layout is good, and it is easy to refer to parts later if needed. The typeface is good, and the cover is attractive – it states exactly what the book covers. The content is set out logically. The third part is a workbook, which takes time and depends on where you are on your cancer journey. It can be emotionally draining but is thought provoking and you can choose not to do this part until you are ready to face it. The book recommends a website to look at, but it was not available on several occasions.

I will probably recommend it. It is very useful for emotional support, with ideas and ways to deal with feelings. Reading the various stories from all the contributors makes you realise that there are many ways to react to diagnosis, not just one way. I like that several people contributed; aspects are covered by a range of people with different cancers and it is not just one opinion, which is useful; there is something for most people to relate to. The author seems to understand the cancer pathway well – she has had cancer herself and is a bereavement specialist; this makes the reader feel they are “in safe hands”.

**Living with bowel cancer and liver mets (56-65) (April 2019)**

This is directed mainly at someone who has, or has had, cancer, but may be a useful read for someone close to them as it may provide understanding of what they are going through. It is most useful for helping people come to terms with their cancer experience, recognise their emotional and mental response to it and move forward.

It is very easy to read and does not use any particularly difficult or obscure terms. I like the cover and the title but would have preferred it to be the size of a regular book, e.g. a novel. It is more like a workbook.

This book is helpful and supportive to anyone going through cancer and will help most people wherever they are in their experience. Part 2 (Stories of normal) is the most interesting section; the stories are from real people, and so matter, and as a fellow patient it is easy to empathise with their journeys. Overall, the impression is that one is not alone; many others go through the ups and downs of cancer and there is something you can do to feel better and have a positive outlook for the future.

**On drug treatment to prevent recurrence of breast cancer (66-75) (April 2019)**

Overall, this is a helpful resource that has some pertinent information for most groups of people, including someone living with cancer, those who care for them, their family and friends, and health professionals. The inclusion of first-hand experiences brings the information nearer to the targeted audience. It is somewhat difficult to pin down when it might be most useful. It has been useful in reminding me of things forgotten post diagnosis and it might have been useful earlier in the journey as well. It could, however, also cause some distress if read at an early stage of the cancer journey.

It is very readable and took a long two-and-a-half-hour train journey to complete reading most of it. Visually it is fine, and the index is sufficiently detailed to enable readers to find their way around. It is generally in a logical order, but I would prefer part three after part one, then the individual stories to reinforce the messages.

I like the use of individual stories and I would probably recommend it, but it needs an element of care when recommending as part three may not be right for everyone; it was not what I was expecting having read part one. I don't like the prescriptive nature of the tasks and the suggested timings. I particularly dislike the injunction to revisit the workbook; the author is presuming that their experience is the one for all individuals. This approach is a pity since the overall content is potentially helpful.

### **Cancer survivor and retired health professional (66-75) (April 2019)**

Anyone who wants to understand the psychological effects of cancer could benefit from this book. It highlights the emotional side of cancer and offers a way forward.

Part 1 is an in depth look at the psychological response to cancer. It's natural to feel a sense of loss – life has suddenly changed. Chan describes how we experience loss – each loss is like a hole in a boat; the water flowing in is the emotional response. With each hole, the water builds up until the leak is addressed, or the boat sinks. This great analogy is an effective way to describe how we can feel overwhelmed.

Part 2 has eight stories, transcripts of interviews with people who have had cancer and the author's story. Each follows the same basic format: Diagnosis; Treatment; What Helped; Life Now. They illustrate how people cope – there's no right or wrong way. For example, one person went to a support group but didn't like it, another found a support group invaluable, one sought the help of a psychologist. Being able to relate to what other people go through can be very helpful.

Part 3 consists of a workbook and self-help exercises to identify and work through emotions. These take time and may feel challenging. Some readers may be unfamiliar with this type of self-enquiry and prefer to seek help. Anyone who hasn't done this type of exercise before and gets stuck, can contact the author by email.

It's very important to highlight the psychological implications of any illness and this book raises awareness of the emotional impact of cancer, that people cope in different ways, and that there is help available. There is much to be gained from this book, even if the exercises do not resonate.

### **Breast cancer survivor (56-65) (April 2019)**

This could be useful for someone with cancer, a partner or carer, family member or friend. The most useful parts are the chapters about dealing with grief, not just about someone dying but other losses, such as loss of health when diagnosed with cancer. I like how the author explains the grief process, how it is also physical and not just emotional, and it doesn't fit into a tick box.

It follows a logical order, with exercises at the end. There are few technical words and the text is simple but informative. The cover shows that it isn't just someone selling their story – I knew it would be informative. I didn't notice any inaccuracies, but my experience of diagnosis was very different from those described.

### **Secondary ovarian cancer patient (46-55) (March 2019)**

This clearly-written book has three parts: the author's experience; those of other patients; and a detailed process for "Mapping your cancer experience", with worksheets to explore your feelings about what has happened, and to reconnect with your true emotions. I always find it helpful to read personal stories and know from my experience that it is natural to try to protect your family and friends from how you truly feel, which can lead to burying of understanding for yourself. The worksheets offer a safe way to deal with those emotions. The author is a professional with experience in helping people recover from grief and offers support one to one and in workshops.

It could be particularly useful for becoming aware of feelings and the effects of cancer. This can work for anyone, but it will depend on how much people decide to get involved in the detailed processes described in the workbook. I didn't do the exercises but as someone who has done much of this sort of personal exploration in the past, and as a life coach, I know how valuable the insights can be.

### **Past cervical cancer patient (66-75) (March 2019)**



This book about the emotional and mental impact of cancer aims to help people cope with the repercussions of this life-changing event. It is written in an accessible way; the author emphasises that she is not a medical professional but has experience of supporting people with cancer.

I did struggle with it. Part 1, which discusses emotional responses to diagnosis, is the most interesting. There are some interesting ideas about mindfulness and positivity as well as the idea that you can't be perfect. Cancer is messy physically and emotionally and trying to be a 'winner' all the time is unrealistic. However, the author could go into this in more detail. I like some of the stories in Part 2 – it is interesting to hear others' experiences and their different decisions – but I did find some of the stories disjointed. This may have been because of their experiences, but as I read on I became more disengaged. By Part 3 I couldn't really go on. This section has a series of exercises that just didn't appeal to me. I tried a couple of times, but I just wasn't invested in the process. The exercises seemed laborious and turned me off.

There are some interesting ideas about emotional well-being and grief in this book, but it did not appeal to me. The interesting ideas in Part 1 are not explored enough and I lost interest in Part 2 as I read through; by Part 3 I had completely switched off.

### **Living with non-Hodgkin lymphoma (56-65) (August 2019)**

Although this is advertised as a book for anyone affected by cancer, it certainly feels more aimed at and beneficial for someone with cancer than family or friends. The patient stories are the most useful part. They give people with cancer the opportunity to read about and relate to others with cancer. They also highlight how different each journey can be but how everyone faces similar challenges. I believe that, as intended, it is most useful for managing the emotional and mental impact of cancer.

The cover is very appealing. It is brightly coloured and looks interesting. It did feel like a textbook to me, but this is just an observation rather than a criticism. It feels good quality, but it would be nice to have some colour inside. The content is in a logical order, starting with the background to emotions and feelings, then patient stories, finally activities to help cope with the emotional impact. The language and terminology are easy to understand throughout. I did however feel that the activities at the end of the book could be quite challenging for an older person to work through alone. In addition, although the website links are optional and an 'add on', many people may choose to read a book if they are unable to access the internet.

I like that the author explains some of the science behind emotions as this allows the reader to understand why their body may react in a certain way when faced with different emotions. I also like that the author made me feel that my emotions were normal and that everyone reacts differently. In addition, comparing a cancer diagnosis to grief is helpful. The patient stories are the best part of this book. I like that the author did not change the stories to fit her beliefs – this makes them seem more real and highlights the different beliefs that exist about cancer. As a daughter of a kidney cancer patient, I found it helped me to understand and realise some of the emotions that my father may be going through. It also normalised my emotions.

The book is let down by the activities at the end. The back cover explains that the author offers 'practical steps' to manage the emotional/mental impact of cancer and I expected to find everyday useful ways to help cope when times are tough. However, the worksheets are very in-depth, and the author suggests spending one full day alone or two half days to complete them – this would put off many people. Also, the exercises follow on from each other – if you are unable to complete the first, then the next ones would be unsuitable. In addition, the author states that the exercises may provoke potentially 'uncomfortable, dark scary thoughts and feelings', as a warning to people with a recognised history of mental illness not to do them alone. Although I understand why this is in place, it could frighten people and put them off.

Overall, the first two sections are quite useful, but I probably would not recommend it.

### **Daughter of kidney cancer patient (Under 25) (April 2019)**

In my view, this book is not for everyone. It will be most useful for those who wish to analyse their thoughts, their past hurts, and find a way forward through their grief.

The author has had surgery for bowel cancer and no further treatment. Her book is divided into three sections. The first part explores the subject of 'cancer grief'. She considers the emotional impact of a cancer diagnosis in the context of loss and grief. She identifies the negative feelings and thoughts experienced by people with cancer. The second part contains real-life personal stories of eight people who have cancer, illustrating the range of emotional responses that people have, acknowledging (to use her words) that there is no one-size-fits-all. The third part is a 'workbook', a series of exercises that the author recommends. This suggests that a person sits down in a quiet place with paper and pens, mapping the cancer experience, discovering his or her guide to life, taking stock and letting go, a set of processes that takes hours for maximum impact. (An alternative is that the reader could attend one of her workshops and be guided through this process.)

It is very easy to understand. The author does not have medical qualifications and does not write about medical or anatomical aspects of cancer. It is a slightly larger than usual paperback book. The layout is clear and attractive. I like that this book is well organised into separate parts. A reader can skip parts if required. The author is clearly an altruistic person. She has devoted her life to helping others – through a not-for-profit organisation that she has founded. Her compassion and helpfulness shines through her writing.

Some people may find it very helpful, but I am concerned that some could end up more distressed. The author has had some training as a grief recovery specialist and her mission is to focus on supporting people through the emotional and mental impact of their cancer experience. Her commitment to helping others and her altruism shines through the content of this book. However, this approach is not for everyone. I fear that her exploration of negative/grieving emotions may bring up upset, confusion and sadness in her readers that may not have otherwise been confronted at a time when an individual is feeling most vulnerable. By suggesting this menu of negative reactions, this could alarm and sadden some suggestible readers. I also have concerns that she has invited readers who are grieving to contact her for help.

Suppose substantial numbers of people take up her offer? She could run the risk of letting down vulnerable people. I also worry that the process of being alone, raking through former losses may not be helpful for some. Others would find it insightful.

Juliette Chan is a compassionate person who devotes her life to helping others. This is undeniably commendable. However, I do conclude that this approach may not be appropriate for everyone.

**Former medical professional working with people with head and neck cancer. Friend and former carer (66-75) (March 2019)**

This is most useful for helping to cope with losing the person that you once were. There is a lot of talk about grief and bereavement about oneself, which is great as this is mentioned in many books, but seldom addressed by a professional. It is an interesting book to dip into rather than read from beginning to end. I think that most cancer experiences tend to evoke similar feelings, and this captures them well. The language is very easy to understand. It is written clearly and with simplicity without being patronising. It looks ok, like a self-help book.

There are case studies to read and a workbook at the end to help someone who has, or has had, cancer to work through when and where the grief occurred in the cancer timeline and then how to alleviate this. It is not an easy under taking and I could not manage this, and I am not having treatment, nor have I had it.

I like that it's written by someone who has been there but as with most cancer books, it assumes that you have had, or are receiving, treatment. Is it a book that I would buy? Probably not and I would have very probably 'pooh-poohed' it if someone had suggested I read it. But, having 'had' to review it, I was surprised at how insightful and useful it might turn out to be... when I'm ready.

### **Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (46-55) (February 2019)**



I do not see this book being very useful without association to an organised short course; it reads like a course or lecture notes. However, the first section is great for someone recently diagnosed with any cancer.

It is very easy to understand, and the author is obviously well practiced in dealing with and speaking to people with a cancer experience. It is very clearly laid out in relevant sections and the cover design is clever.

I like the first section. The second section not a lot of use as we all have our own and varied personal stories that may or may not relate to the reader. The timed workshops in the last section are out of keeping and difficult for someone coming to terms with their situation unless they are deliberately on a short course, which I think the author offers – almost an advert.

Although this is a well-written and well-presented book, I found it, unusually, a difficult read; it seems to talk down to the reader by someone who appears to suggest they have all the answers. If only that were true. The first section is excellent, but the personal stories are not necessary, and I disliked the timed worksheets intensely.

### **Living with advanced and metastasised prostate cancer (66-75) (June 2019)**

Juliette Chan, a bereavement volunteer and an Advanced Grief Recovery Specialist, providing support and training for people facing life-changing events, was diagnosed with bowel cancer in 2016. As she reflected on the psychological effects, she realised that she was grieving, something she had handled many times before following other major life changes. Using her expertise, she was quickly able to regain peace of mind and emotional wellbeing. This book is based on the process that she used.

Her book is divided into three sections, focusing on the mental and emotional effects of cancer. A review of psychological responses to cancer explores mental and emotional responses, coping with the conflict between head and heart, and being emotionally healthy. The author's experience and those of eight other patients are designed to prompt questions in the reader's mind and show that there is no such thing as a normal cancer experience. Finally, there is a four-stage self-help workbook developed by Juliette, also used on a two-day Cancer Roller Coaster Workshop she leads. The 16 exercises can take some six hours to complete. It covers areas such as core beliefs, what is currently going on in your life, what you want to change and a process to help let go of any mental and emotional pain connected to cancer.

The book is well presented and contains much information. The thrust of the narrative is to move the reader to complete the self-help workbook in part three (a suggested six-hour exercise) designed to identify what life changes they would like to change and to help them let go of significant mental and emotional pain attached to cancer. Things are explained clearly albeit in a rather 'text book' style of writing.

Juliette sets out to provide support and training for those facing life-changing events so that they can regain peace of mind, develop clarity, and find their way forward. The whole book is focused towards that end. As a result, its messages will benefit only those suffering psychological difficulties who are seeking help. Other readers will gain just an understanding of the process being followed, perhaps so that they can support to someone who is using it or make a recommendation to a potential user.

It is an attempt to provide information about the psychological aspects of cancer and its treatment, a topic where information is limited. As a carer, I found it difficult to engage fully with what was being communicated, particularly as the major benefit appears to flow from completing the workbook – something that can only really be done by patients. So, a carer reads it to get an understanding of the process so that they can support the patient. I might recommend it but with a warning about the overall approach. I can see it having a limited appeal. For a patient concerned about the emotional and mental impact of cancer and motivated to read this book and complete the workbook, I am sure the outputs will be beneficial.

**Carer for wife who has had bowel cancer twice (Over 75) (May 2019)**

# 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](http://macmillan.org.uk)**

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