

Balancing Medical Ethics and Patient Positivity in Cancer Care

- Dr. Sandeep Jasuja

We often talk about the profound impact of stress on health, and this is especially true for patients facing a cancer diagnosis. One of the most pressing questions on a patient's mind when they first meet with their doctor is often, "What is my stage of cancer?" This question is loaded with anxiety and fear, and as healthcare providers, we are faced with the challenge of delivering the truth in a way that maintains both ethical integrity and patient hope.

When we tell a patient that their prognosis is negative, such as predicting they may only have six months to live, we have to ask ourselves—what are we truly trying to achieve? Are we doing the right thing by being brutally honest, or is there a more compassionate way to handle these difficult conversations that still respects the patient's need for hope and positivity?

This dilemma is at the heart of the medical profession. It's essential to be honest with patients, but we must also consider the psychological impact of our words. There's no denying that a negative prognosis can be devastating, but it's also important to remember that patients have a remarkable capacity to fight and persevere, often beyond the expectations set by statistics.

Integrating alternative medicine and therapies into conventional cancer care has shown promise in supporting this fight. For instance, when Sanjeevani Life Beyond Cancer began offering nutritional support to breast cancer patients who were struggling with the side effects of chemotherapy and immunotherapy, we noticed a significant improvement. Patients who received comprehensive care, including nutrition, psychotherapy, and yoga, were not only better able to tolerate their treatments but also maintained a more positive outlook, which is crucial in the healing process.

This experience highlights the importance of a holistic approach to cancer care. By combining conventional treatments with alternative therapies, such as herbal medicine or even cannabis for managing severe vomiting, we can offer patients a more balanced and less toxic treatment plan. This approach not only helps manage the physical side effects of cancer treatment but also supports the patient's mental and emotional well-being.

The advancements in immunotherapy are particularly exciting because they align closely with the principles of alternative medicine. Immunotherapy works by harnessing the body's own immune system to fight cancer, much like how alternative therapies aim to boost overall immunity and health. By integrating these approaches, we can offer patients a more comprehensive treatment plan that targets the cancer while also strengthening the body's natural defenses.

It's also important to acknowledge that a significant percentage of cancers are lifestyle-related. For example, breast cancer is often linked to elevated estrogen levels, which can be influenced by stress, obesity, and other factors. Managing these lifestyle factors is crucial not just in treatment but also in prevention. Stress management, in particular, is vital, as high cortisol levels due to stress can increase the risk of cancer by affecting estrogen levels.

When it comes to discussing prognosis, especially with patients diagnosed at an advanced stage, it's vital to strike a balance between honesty and hope. In India, where a large percentage of cancer cases are diagnosed at stage 3 or 4, these conversations are all too common. While it's important to be transparent about the survival chances, it's equally important to encourage patients to focus on the present and the steps they can take to improve their quality of life.

Patients often experience a range of emotions, from denial to acceptance, when they learn about their diagnosis. Supporting them through these emotional phases with clear information and compassionate care can make a significant difference in their journey. It's not just about giving them the facts; it's about helping them and their families navigate this challenging time with dignity and hope.

In the end, the goal is to provide cancer care that respects the patient's need for both truth and optimism. By integrating alternative therapies, focusing on holistic care, and maintaining open communication, we can help patients face their diagnosis with courage and a better quality of life. This approach not only aligns with our ethical responsibilities as medical practitioners but also honors the resilience and strength that patients bring to their fight against cancer.

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