



Left: Heather with her providers Ban Wong, L.Ac., Ann Mathews, LMT, and Brian Enebo, D.C. at The Center for Integrative Medicine

“I believe that integrative medicine helps to bring the soul into a good place and the mind and body follow.”

Cancer is more than chemo

Patient: Heather Hoffman-Blois

After being diagnosed with a rare type of cancer in February 2013, Heather Hoffman-Blois came to The Center for Integrative Medicine to seek out some complementary and alternative treatment methods. Heather was the first patient who applied and was accepted into the Complementary Cancer Support Funding Program after it was opened in April 2013. Since then, we have given out 218 free treatments for massage therapy and acupuncture through our funding program to patients who are currently undergoing cancer treatments.

DIAGNOSIS OF A RARE CANCER

Heather was recently diagnosed with malignant mesothelioma peritoneal, which develops from the cells of the protective lining that covers many of the internal organs of the body. What this resulted in was symptoms that were for years leaving doctors clueless and with no answers or relief after being poked and prodded and

undergoing numerous scans and blood work tests. Some of these symptoms (shortness of breath, body swelling 10-15 lbs., dizziness, chest/abdominal pain) that took a toll on Heather's life were the consequence of her uterus swimming in fluid. At first she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and had a full hysterectomy – and it wasn't until they were doing the surgery that her actual diagnosis was discovered.

Heather comes from a line of family that has worked in steel mills and the theory they came up with was that somehow she ingested or inhaled asbestos fibers from her father's work clothes – she liked to wear her dad's jacket around the house when she was little. There is little research on mesothelioma, but the most common cause is through exposure to asbestos. Signs and symptoms are also commonly known to not appear until 20 to 50 years after exposure to asbestos.



Complementary Cancer Support Funding Program

For more information on the funding program The Center for Integrative Medicine offers to patients in active cancer treatment, read the [brochure](#).

If you are interested in donating to a fund, check out the [list of funds](#) you can contribute to. More information can be found on our website www.uch.edu/integrativemed.

As a care giver...

Heather shared with us how supportive her husband has been through this journey and how he wanted to do it all, but (as with anyone) it began to take a toll on his own health and well-being. This is common for those who surround you because they cannot change what you are going through so it leaves them feeling hopeless.

The way that Heather put this was that, since her husband saw the value of their friendship, they shared the understanding that they were part of a team. And right now half the team was down, which simply allowed others (their support system of friends, family, church and others) to come and fill in. With so many resources out there you should never feel you are fighting this alone.

Read [6 Ways to Find a Peace of Mind When a Loved One Has Cancer](#)

INTEGRATIVE THERAPIES: HOW THEY HAVE HELPED

In addition to her traditional cancer treatments, Heather comes to The Center for Integrative Medicine to see an acupuncturist, chiropractor and massage therapist. Heather believes that there is so much more to cancer than chemotherapy – that these therapies are one way to help bring the soul to a good place and if the soul is in the good place the mind and body will follow. In other words, while traditional cancer treatment has helped her survive, integrative medicine therapies have helped her thrive and she says they have been essential in her healing.

ACUPUNCTURE

Oncology acupuncture can relieve nausea and vomiting caused by chemotherapy and may help improve immune system function.

According to the National Institutes for Health, studies have shown that acupuncture may alter brain chemistry in ways that affect the body's immune reactions, blood pressure regulation, blood flow and temperature, and it may aid in the activity of endorphins and immune cells at specific sites in the body.

Heather explains how Dr. Ban Wong is in tune with what is going on with her body and has been able to find all the right areas to release pain. She says because she is giving herself up to something greater than herself it is also helping with the mind-body-soul phase.

September 26th was Mesothelioma Awareness Day
Read the top 8 things you don't know about this cancer, but should. Then share them. The key to saving lives starts with education.

1. Mesothelioma is caused by asbestos exposure.
2. No amount of exposure is safe.
3. Asbestos was once used in more than 3,000 consumer products.
4. It can be found in many older homes, schools, factories, and commercial buildings.
5. Asbestos exposure is still the LEADING CAUSE of occupational cancer in the U.S.
6. United States Veterans are at the greatest risk.
7. Asbestos is still not banned in the U.S.
8. Mesothelioma can be caused by secondary exposure.

CHIROPRACTIC

Heather explained how chiropractic helped some of her symptoms of chemotherapy – in particular, her muscle stiffness in her lower back. Heather's preference was to see Ann Mathews for massage therapy first to loosen her up and get ready to see Dr. Brian Enebo for the larger-scale chiropractic adjustments.

Dr. Enebo also helped provide some advice on self-care strategies, such as this ball bridge exercise for lower back strengthening:



Crouch down and press shoulder blades against exercise ball. Extend back until parallel to the floor (breathe in) and lower it back after short pause (breathe out).

MASSAGE THERAPY

Massage therapy is shown to not only help with reducing anxiety and relieving pain, but studies show significant decrease in respiratory rates as well as a significant increase in white blood cells and natural killer cell activity, suggesting a benefit to the immune system.

According to Heather, massage has helped with her mind-body-soul connection and gives her a chance to relax and release stress. She holds a lot of stress in her lower back and shoulders and massage has helped to relieve some of that both physically and mentally.

Heather says that the biggest, scariest and life threatening experience was her most recent Cytoreductive surgery with [Hyperthermic Intraperitoneal Chemotherapy](#) in June where integrative medicine was crucial to her mind, body and soul before, during and after her surgery. Other alternative therapies Heather said helped through her treatment process include health and wellness classes, eating organic, seasoning food with ginger, garlic, oregano and cinnamon, meditation classes, drinking organic green tea with local raw honey, drinking protein shakes, cleaning food with lemon oil, using essential and dōTERRA oils and Jin Shin Jyutsu.

While these therapies may not be for everyone, Heather said that one of the important lessons she has learned is that as a cancer patient you need to center yourself as just that and allow yourself to mentally go to that place, but not stay there. She has allowed herself to lean on her very supportive family, spouse, friends and church and even people she has never met. She knows that battling cancer is not something you can fight alone and she reflects on the many people she has met and created relationships with in her life and how this kindness is coming back to her. When she has a dark day, one way she finds the sunshine is in the many cards and kind words she has been given from her circle of support. Her strong faith has also come back to her in the form of prayers and strength when she felt she could go no further. All of these things Heather says are what lift her and give her hope.