

THE COMMONWEAL CANCER HELP PROGRAM

Dear Friend,

Thank you for inquiring about the Commonweal Cancer Help Program. We very much hope that we can be of help to you, either by helping you get access to books and resources near home that may assist you, or by helping you decide whether to join a Cancer Help Program retreat or one of the increasing number of programs inspired, in part or in whole, by the Cancer Help Program that are developing around the United States.

The Commonweal Cancer Help Program (CCHP) is dedicated to helping people seeking physical, emotional, and spiritual healing in the face of cancer. The workshops offer a rich variety of opportunities for both intellectual and experiential learning. The CCHP is not a cancer therapy or treatment program. It is a place to explore the issues, choices, feelings and concerns that people with cancer often have, in the company of others, with an experienced and concerned staff.

Almost all participants in the Commonweal Cancer Help Program report highly positive experiences. Some people come to learn about informed choices in conventional and complementary cancer therapies. Others look forward to yoga, progressive deep relaxation, meditation and imagery. Some seek the companionship of others facing cancer and the deep sharing of experiences that takes place in the morning sessions. Others appreciate the delicious vegetarian diet and caring massage. Using art, poetry, dreams and sand trays as practical and vivid approaches to self-exploration is surprisingly beneficial.

For most of us on the staff, the Commonweal Cancer Help Program is without qualification the best work we have found in our professional lives. We dedicate ourselves to serving you during the week you are here. Our goal is to provide the highest quality small-group support program for people with cancer, and members of their families or support people, that we possibly can.

When my father developed cancer, I began my study of complementary (alternative and adjunctive) cancer therapies to see if any of them had something to offer him. I visited over 30 clinics in Europe and North America, talked with hundreds of physicians and health professionals knowledgeable about these therapies, and interviewed over a thousand patients. Later, I extended my investigation to explore options in established cancer therapies as well. In 1988-90, I served as special consultant to a landmark study prepared and published by the Office of Technology Assessment of the United States

Congress. In 1994, I published Choices in Healing: Integrating the Best of Conventional and Complementary Approaches to Cancer [MIT Press, \$17.50]. It received a warm welcome in the mainstream press, the medical journals, and in holistic health journals as well.

During the Commonweal Cancer Help Program retreats, we critically review the range of choices in established and complementary therapies as objectively as possible. Participants may use our extensive cancer library, audio/video collection, and our research files on a wide variety of therapies and cancers.

Having said this about the opportunities to gather information on choice in cancer therapies, I should add that for many participants the experiential dimensions of the program turn out to be as important, if not more important, than learning about the process of informed choice.

Over the past 20 years, the Commonweal Cancer Help Program has become widely known. The program has received national attention in The New York Times Magazine, American Health, Medical Self-Care, Advances, and other publications as one of the leading residential cancer support programs in the United States. The Commonweal Cancer Help Program was filmed by television journalist Bill Moyers and filmmaker David Grubin for an hour-long documentary called "Wounded Healers," as one part of the award-winning PBS series "Healing and the Mind." The Commonweal Cancer Help Program has also received strong support from oncologists, psychotherapists, and other health professionals.

One result of this widespread awareness of the Cancer Help Program is that we often have a waiting list of people who would like to participate. Because we only take eight people on each retreat (the ideal number for small group work), and conduct only six 7-day retreats each year; it became an ethical imperative for us to help other centers to start their own versions of the Commonweal Cancer Help Program. There are now a number of these programs across the United States and Canada. We strongly encourage you to explore these programs, talk with them and then decide what is best for you. They usually have short waiting lists, so you may get into one of their retreats quickly.

We have found that the Commonweal Cancer Help Program retreats work best for the people who (1) have a real interest in making a sustained personal effort to engage with their illness, (2) have the personal maturity to work well in a small workshop setting, and (3) believe they would benefit from a week of yoga, group support, relaxation, meditation, imagery, massage, and exploration of options in established and complementary cancer therapies. Group sessions led by the psychologically trained co-leader in each workshop, are a central part of the program, and provide opportunities for deep self-exploration and sharing.

All participants must be under the care of an oncologist or other allopathic (conventional) physician, able to care for them selves in Commonweal's rural environment, and

currently well enough to benefit from the program. We do not provide medical care during the retreat.

The daily schedule is as follows: morning yoga including postures, deep relaxation, breath work and meditation, then breakfast, support group, lunch, followed by individual activities, afternoon yoga, dinner and evening programs. During individual activities, each participant has three one-hour massage sessions, one counseling session and one or two one-hour sessions with sand tray. There is also time available for consultations with the staff. (Please see typical retreat schedule attached.) We ask participants in the program not to leave the site during the week unless medically required to do so, not to invite friends for visits, nor make extensive use of the telephone. We do not have newspapers or television available.

The all-inclusive basic fee for the workshop is currently \$1880 per person. We should add that we make no money on these retreats. The fee is in fact supplemented by contributions from participants who have come before and other friends who help us keep the price as reasonable as possible. Each workshop is limited to eight or nine participants. Spouses and other close support people are welcome to enroll, at the same fee and with the same full program as other participants. Partial scholarship assistance is available on a limited basis to those for whom the full fee is a barrier to participation.

PROGRAM DATES FOR 2006

FEBRUARY 13-19

SEPTEMBER 25-OCT 1

APRIL 3-9

OCTOBER 23-29

JUNE 5-11

DECEMBER 4-10

If you would like more information about the program or would like to apply, please call Waz Thomas, Program Coordinator. Waz will discuss all details of the program as well as the specifics of the application process. You may receive an application only after telephone contact with him.

Commonweal is located on the historic RCA and Marconi transmitter site in the Point Reyes National Seashore, near the small coastal town of Bolinas. Pacific House, the beautiful eleven-bedroom guesthouse where participants stay, overlooks a spectacular coastline and a beautiful isolated beach. We are surrounded by 1,000 acres of National Park Service land.

The Commonweal Cancer Help Program is supported to a large extent by personal contributions. This helps us keep the cost for people with cancer as low as possible, and enables us to provide some scholarships. We need and welcome support for the CCHP Scholarship Fund.

We thank you for your interest in the Commonweal Cancer Help Program.

All this information and more, including Michael Lerner's book, Choices in Healing, is available on our web site at <<http://www.commonweal.org>>.

Here are notes on some the people who staff the Commonweal Cancer Help Program:

Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D., is co-founder and Medical Director of the Commonweal Cancer Help Program and is Assistant Clinical Professor of Family and Community Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine. Dr. Remen is the founder and Director of the Institute for the Study of Health and Illness, a training program for health professionals who wish to serve people with life-threatening illness. She is a pioneer in the transpersonal counseling of people with chronic and terminal illness, and their families, and has a forty-year personal history of chronic illness. Her work represents a unique blend of the perspectives of physician and patient.

Stuart Horance, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist who has been working with individuals facing life-threatening illness, their loved ones, and their care providers since 1982. A primary focus of his professional activity has been the facilitation of support groups for people in a variety of situations who are seeking a way through challenging life circumstances. He holds a transpersonal or spiritually based therapeutic perspective, which has been influenced by his personal experiences as a musician, a long-time meditator, and an individual living with chronic illness.

Lenore Lefer, M.F.T. is a licensed psychotherapist, teacher and consultant who has used Psychosynthesis, a spiritual psychology, as the central framework for her work for almost 30 years. She has worked with women's groups in the US, Canada, Europe, Lithuania and Russia. Her work with Hospice and people with heart disease and cancer includes imagery, meditation, group process and dream symbols as means of renewing the spirit.

Waz Thomas, is Commonweal's General Manager and a CCHP co-founder. He has been specifically responsible for coordinating the Commonweal Cancer Help Program since its inception, and is responsible for the wellbeing of both participants and staff during the week. Waz is a beloved yoga teacher who teaches most of the yoga classes when the CHP is held at the Commonweal site.

Jnani Chapman, RN, PHN, CMT is massage coordinator for both the Commonweal and Smith Farm Cancer Help Programs. She was a post-graduate researcher with the Department of Physiological Nursing in the School of Nursing at UCSF. She is former executive director of the International Association of Yoga Therapists and maintains a private practice as a nurse consultant, massage and acupressure practitioner, diet and nutrition consultant and yoga teacher.

Jenepher Stowell is Director of the Commonweal Retreat Center. She also serves as Program Associate on the Commonweal Cancer Help Program and conducts the pre- and

post-retreat participant interviews. Jenepher has a deep interest in the relationship between the environments we inhabit and how they effect our capacity for healing.

I am a political scientist who has been active in health and environmental issues for the past twenty years. Commonweal is a health and environmental research institute with three areas of program interest: helping people with cancer; helping children and young people with learning and social problems; and contributing towards an environmentally sustainable future. I received a MacArthur Prize Fellowship for my work in health in 1983, and was special consultant to the Office of Technology Assessment of the United States Congress for its major report on Unconventional Cancer Treatments. My book, Choices in Healing, mentioned above, is available through many bookstores [Barnes and Noble often stocks it] or by mail from Commonweal. Since Choices in Healing summarizes much of what I have learned, getting a copy is often a useful starting place if you are interested in the Commonweal Cancer Help Program.

A Special Note on Caffeine, Alcohol, and Smoking

Let me add one note on how the Cancer Help Program works with caffeine, alcohol, and smoking. Three of the most common addictions in American society are to caffeine, alcohol, and cigarettes. While the vegetarian diet of the Commonweal Cancer Help Program is a new experience for many participants, the issues of caffeine, alcohol, and smoking are questions we have worked with for many years.

With regard to alcohol, we do not provide or allow alcoholic drinks on the site during the Commonweal Cancer Help Program. You should be comfortable with this policy if you are planning to come.

Caffeine, in both coffee and tea, is a more difficult problem. We do not provide coffee or caffeine tea on the Cancer Help Program except by special arrangement. We strongly encourage people who currently drink coffee or caffeine tea regularly to withdraw from caffeine at least ten days before coming to Commonweal. Research shows that caffeine withdrawal may be accompanied by headaches, drowsiness, fatigue, and occasionally, nausea. It has been our experience that participants undergoing caffeine withdrawal during the program have had difficulty experiencing the full benefits of the program as a result. If you feel you cannot withdraw from caffeine in advance of the program, you can discuss whether we can make an exception in your case with Program Coordinator, Waz Thomas.

Cigarette smoking is a particularly difficult addiction for people to overcome. We do accept smokers in the Commonweal Cancer Help Program, and we do allow smokers to smoke outdoors during the program as needed. Many smokers find that their need for cigarettes is greatly reduced in the course of the week. Obviously, withdrawing from cigarette smoking before coming to Commonweal will bring added benefit to your experience of the program.

We hope we can serve you through the Cancer Help Program, either simply by helping you find books and resources that may be valuable to you, or by helping you identify one of the other weeklong retreat programs that may be available, or by having you join us here at Commonwealth for one of our weeklong retreats.

With warm best wishes,

Michael Lerner
President

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