

A Letter About the Commonweal Cancer Help Program

Dear Friend:

Thank you for your interest in the Commonweal Cancer Help Program. We hope we can help you. That is why we are here.

The Cancer Help Program (CCHP) is dedicated to helping people with cancer – people like you – to find deep healing. Deep healing goes beyond the indispensable treatments that you choose with your oncologist and medical team. Deep healing means healing at the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual levels. (For those who don't think in "spiritual" terms, you can think of that fourth level of healing as one that involves the exploration of meaning and purpose in life.)

Over the past twenty years, the Cancer Help Program has received national attention in *The New York Times Magazine*, *American Health*, *Medical Self-Care*, *Advances*, and other publications. It 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 CCHP has also received strong support from oncologists, psychotherapists, and other health professionals.

The CCHP is *not* a cancer treatment program. It is a place to explore the issues, choices, feelings, concerns, and questions that cancer often evokes. The Cancer Help Program focuses entirely on the quality of what we offer. Because of our focus on quality over quantity, we accept only eight (occasionally nine) participants on each retreat and offer only six retreats each year. Your spouse, close relative, or significant other is welcome to participate with you.

What makes the CCHP so powerful is the combination of the site, the program, the staff, and the remarkable participants who come to spend a week with us in deep healing work.

Site: Commonweal is located on the historic and stunningly beautiful RCA Transmitter Station in the Point Reyes National Seashore, near the small coastal town of Bolinas, an hour's drive north of San Francisco. Pacific House, the simple but elegant eleven-bedroom guesthouse where you stay, overlooks a spectacular coastline and isolated beach. We are surrounded by thousands of acres of National Park Service land. Many participants draw deep nourishment from the healing power of nature that surrounds us at Commonweal.

Program: Many participants find the week transforms their experience of living with cancer. In morning support groups led by a skilled psychotherapist, participants explore their experience with cancer and other matters of importance in their inner lives. There are also individual sessions with the psychotherapist and with other senior staff. I lead sessions in which we explore informed choices in healing and in conventional and complementary cancer therapies. There are daily yoga sessions and three hour-long massage sessions during the week. The experience of sand tray surprises people with its power, as does a session on the healing power of words. Most people love the delicious organic and primarily vegetarian meals, and appreciate the session on nutrition and cooking.

Staff: I'll say more about the staff below. Virtually all participants comment on the quality of the staff and their complete commitment to supporting your work in deep healing.

Participants: Just as remarkable as the staff is the quality and commitment of the participants who sign up for a week of deep healing in the Cancer Help Program. Because this work requires that we all support each other in the quest for deep healing, the qualities of the people who show up to be here with you matters.

Is the Cancer Help Program right for you? Ask yourself these three questions:

- Do you understand what the Cancer Help Program offers? Do you believe that you would benefit from a week of yoga, group support, relaxation, meditation, imagery, massage, expressive arts therapy, and the exploration of options in biomedical and integrative cancer therapies?
- Can you work well in a small workshop setting where people are exploring deeply personal issues – and often powerful emotions? This is a critical question, so please be honest with yourself in answering.
- Do you recognize that each participant in the program must find his or her unique way through the cancer experience? We place a strong emphasis on active listening and on speaking for ourselves alone in ways that do not prejudge the experience of others.

Two other criteria that all participants must meet:

- You must be medically stable enough to stay for the week at Commonweal, physically able to care for yourself in Commonweal's rural environment, and well enough to benefit from the program. We do not provide medical care and are an hour away from the hospital. You must be under the care of an oncologist or other qualified physician at home.
- We ask you not to leave the Commonweal site unless medically required to do so, not to invite friends for visits except for lunch on the last day, and to avoid extensive use of cell phones or computers that can detract from our focus on deep healing work.

For us on the staff, we dedicate ourselves entirely 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.* Because the CCHP experience depends so deeply on the staff, let me introduce you to some of them:

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. Stuart and Lenore Lefer (below) alternate as Co-Leaders of the Cancer Help Program.

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.

Arlene Allsman is CCHP Coordinator and **Waz Thomas** is responsible for CCHP alumni relations. Waz served as CCHP Coordinator for 20 years and continues to serve as Commonweal General Manager. You usually speak to Waz first when you call about the CCHP, and then Arlene walks you through the application process. Arlene also accompanies you through the week.

Kate Holcombe teaches yoga for the CCHP. Kate is founder of the Healing Yoga Foundation and leads our one-day CCHP programs at HYF in San Francisco. She has taught yoga for Rachel Naomi Remen's programs for health professionals at Commonweal. Kate also previously served as CCHP Coordinator.

Jnani Chapman, RN, PHN, CMT is the CCHP massage coordinator and also teaches yoga for the program. Jnani 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.

Claire Heart and **Rebecca Katz** alternate cooking for the Cancer Help Program. Both are superb chefs. Rebecca is the author of *Cancer Fighting Kitchen* and *One Bite at a Time*. Rebecca often joins Claire for our cancer nutrition and cooking session.

Irene Gallwey is the CCHP sand tray facilitator. Sand tray is a Jungian expressive arts technique that involves placing objects in a tray filled with sand and exploring the associations or story that the figures in the tray evoke for you. You may be surprised by the power of this experience.

Jenepher Stowell is Director of the Commonweal Retreat Center. She conducts the session on creating healing spaces in your home during the program. Jenepher will also spend some time with you as you arrive and again at the end of the week when we ask you to evaluate your experience.

Susan Braun is the Executive Director of Commonweal and former CEO of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, CURE Media Group, and ED of the American Society of Clinical Oncology Cancer Foundation. Susan has a strong interest in the healing arts and often offers our sessions on healing words and healing circles. Susan also has expertise in helping CCHP participants identify resources in medical treatments.

Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D. serves as CCHP Medical Director, and reviews all applications personally, but does not participate in the program. Rachel is the Director of the Institute for the Study of Health and Illness at Commonweal and the author of *Kitchen Table Wisdom* and *My Grandfather's Blessings*. Rachel is internationally known for her work with health professionals in finding meaning in medicine.

I co-founded Commonweal in 1976. I have studied integrative approaches to healing with cancer for over 25 years. I also co-founded Smith Farm Center for Healing and the Arts in Washington, DC, which does our cancer work in the nation's capitol. In 1988-90, I served as special consultant to a landmark study 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]. I co-lead the Cancer Help Program.

If you would like more information about the program or would like to apply, please call Waz Thomas, who coordinated the Cancer Help Program for over twenty years (415-868-0970). After Waz has talked with you, he will refer you to Arlene Allsman, our new Cancer Help Program Coordinator.

Again, we are here to help you and to serve you. We look forward to having you join us in the Cancer Help Program.

With warm best wishes,

Michael Lerner
President