

## A Letter About the Commonweal Cancer Help Program

Dear Friend:

Thank you for your interest in the Commonweal Cancer Help Program.

The Commonweal Cancer Help Program (CCHP) is dedicated to helping people with cancer 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 level of healing as one that involves the exploration of meaning and purpose in life.)

For over 30 years, CCHP 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*. CCHP has also received strong support from oncologists, psychotherapists, and other health professionals.

CCHP is *not* a cancer treatment program. It is a place to explore the issues, choices, feelings, concerns, and questions that cancer often evokes. 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 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 twelve-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 CCHP 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 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 and a joyful evening of music. The experience of sandtray surprises people with its power. Most people love the delicious organic and primarily vegetarian meals, and appreciate the individual session on nutrition.

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

*Participants:* Just as remarkable as the staff is the quality and commitment of the program participants. Because this work requires that we all support each other in the quest for 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 CCHP offers? Do you believe that you would benefit from a week of yoga, group support, relaxation, meditation, imagery, massage, expressive arts therapy, and 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 prejudice 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 a 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, PhD**, CCHP Co-leader, is a clinical psychologist who has been working with individuals facing life-threatening illness, along with 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. Stuart 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.

**Francis Weller, MFT**, CCHP Co-leader, has been working with the emotional, creative, and spiritual life of men and women for over thirty years. He is a community builder, writer, teacher, and psychotherapist who draws from an extensive background in depth psychology, mythology, group work, and indigenous traditions. His work embodies his love of soul, the arts, ritual and his devotion to bring these into living and sustainable community.

**Margaret Clausen, PsyD**, is a clinical psychologist who has been working with individuals facing life-threatening illness and chronic pain since 2000. A primary focus in her professional activity has been the facilitation of support groups and individual psychotherapy for people who are seeking pathways through challenging life circumstances.

**Arlene Allsman** is the CCHP Coordinator. She also serves as Commonweal Managing Director.

**Waz Thomas** is the CCHP Intake Coordinator and also is responsible for alumni relations. Waz is a co-founder of CCHP and served as CCHP Coordinator for 20 years. He continues to serve as Commonweal General Manager. You usually speak to Waz first when you call about the program.

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

**Jnani Chapman, RN, PHN, CMT**, is the Massage Coordinator and a massage therapist for CCHP, and also teaches yoga in 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** is the CCHP chef. She has a lifelong interest in cooking and nutrition.

**Rebecca Katz** is the Director of the Healing Kitchens Institute at Commonweal and a nutritional educator at CCHP. She provides individualized counseling sessions on nutrition. Rebecca is also the author of three cookbooks: *The Cancer Fighting Kitchen*, *One Bite at a Time*, and *The Longevity Kitchen*.

**Sadja Greenwood, MD**, is a nutritional educator at CCHP, where she provides individualized counseling sessions on nutrition. A physician and writer, she is the author of *Menopause, Naturally: Preparing for the Second Half of Life*. Sadja plays various instruments in a local band and also facilitates groups using self-expression through music for relaxation, communication, and healing the spirit with sound.

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

**Elizabeth Evans** and **Andrea Perry** are a massage therapists for CCHP.

**Katrina Mayo-Smith** is a massage therapist and expressive arts facilitator for CCHP.

**Tim Weed** is the musician for CCHP, where he leads an evening of music. Tim is an acoustic multi-instrumentalist, classical banjo virtuoso, and singer-songwriter. He has been invited to perform at the Arizona Chamber Music Festival and for the Dalai Lama, and his music is regularly featured on National Public Radio.

**Jenepher Stowell** is the Director of the Commonweal Retreat Center. She conducts the session on creating healing spaces in your home during the CCHP retreat. 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.

**Mimi Mindel** is the Cancer Resources Coordinator for CCHP.

**Rachel Naomi Remen, MD**, serves as CCHP Medical Director and reviews all applications personally, but she does not otherwise 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*. She 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 30 years. I also co-founded Smith Center for Healing and the Arts in Washington, D.C., 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, Intake Coordinator, at 415.868.0970 ext. 316 or email [waz@commonweal.org](mailto:waz@commonweal.org).

We look forward to having you join us in the Cancer Help Program.

With warm best wishes,



Michael Lerner  
President