

A Cluster of Cancers: A Simple Coping Guide for Patients

Sherry L. Meinberg

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In *A Cluster of Cancers: A Simple Coping Guide for Patients*, educator and cancer survivor Sherry L. Meinberg has created an optimist's manual for cancer survival. With a plethora of inspirational quotes and personal anecdotes, Meinberg hammers home her main point: how we deal with a cancer diagnosis is up to us.

In the introduction, Meinberg explains that she wants the book to serve as "an easy resource guide, kind of like a CliffsNotes summary." To this end, the book is divided into five broad sections: "Cancer Diagnosis," "Cancer Stages and Grading," "Cancer Statistics," "Cancer Causes," and "Coping With Cancer." The last section makes up the majority of the book, consisting of twenty-seven topical chapters.

Though well-intentioned, Meinberg's chapters on self-care, self-talk, belief, attitude, and intention become redundant, exhausting her basic message that patients must take care of themselves and project a positive image of health and recovery. The chapters on exercise, sleep, and nutrition offer more practical advice for patients, as well as interesting factoids such as the amount of time we spend dreaming throughout our lifetimes. A less-than-scientific chapter on water, however, wanders into mystical territory: "When you send positive thoughts and gratitude to the water you drink, its quality improves, and your health improves, as well. Understand that water is sensitive, and responds to what we say."

Meinberg is more authoritative in the book's earlier sections, in which she describes the emotional experience of cancer and how to avoid fear, guilt, and self-pity. All patients, she says, want to answer the question of why. "Cancer is not a punishment," she asserts. She encourages patients to look at a cancer diagnosis as an opportunity for personal growth: "Granted, your diagnosis may be daunting, but at the same time, it can actually be *freeing*. You now have a definite goal and purpose; a specific target to aim for: being healthy and cancer-free."

What *A Cluster of Cancers* lacks is gritty detail about the physical realities of cancer recovery. For instance, Meinberg never specifically addresses the side effects of chemotherapy or radiation treatment—nothing about wigs or weight loss or nausea and vomiting. In this way, *A Cluster of Cancers* is less a medical manual and more a general work of popular psychology. That's not to say the book isn't impactful. Meinberg's cheery optimism could help cancer patients who may be stuck in a negative frame of mind.

SCOTT NEUFFER (December 16, 2015)

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