



Living better with MBC: *with Resilience*

Phil Kerslake

www.lifepaths.co.nz 14 November 2015

Overview of our session

- My journey
- Why resilience is so important
- Examples of everyday resilience practices
- Key points & takeaway messages
- Questions and comments welcome

My journey so far (1974 -)



Why resilience is so important

- Cancer and its medical treatments can bring us all kinds of physical, psychological, emotional, social, economic and spiritual trauma. **It never was a purely medical issue**
- From the moment of our diagnosis these trauma can affect our ability to focus and function well. **They can reduce our resistance and sometimes, our will to live**
- Research shows that people coping with advanced cancer can suffer most from a sense of loss of control, helplessness and the diminishing of hope
- Cultivating resilience in our daily lives can counter these feelings and **create a point of view that greatly enhances QOL and often, extend length of life** (i.e. Dr David Spiegel, Stanford)

Examples of resilience practices



Proactivity

Proactivity

- Gathering helpful information and on what helps manage your disease and symptoms is very empowering
- In particular, being an active participant in your treatment and care puts you at the helm which counters feelings of helplessness

Relaxation and 'cognitive restructuring' practices

- **Meditation, visualisation & affirmations**
 - Can help you de-stress, make better decisions, communicate more readily and effectively and relate better with others
 - Can enable you to amplify the positive effects and minimise negative consequences of treatments and current circumstances in your mind
 - And these methods are shown to reduce pain and nausea

MUSIC: A highly effective emotional expression and release catalyst

- Music
 - Can open you up to your feelings and enable you to express them
 - Can ease your tensions and focus you
 - Can help you prepare for and cope well with procedures and, as with laughter, elevates mood and hope, reduces pain and nausea and can accelerate healing
 - Enhances the pleasure and joy of life & provide a greater sense of meaning and perspective

Laughter & humour: Life affirming. Terrific mood, hope and optimism - building catalysts

- 'Laughter is the best medicine'

Laughter and humour can lift you, steel you before procedures, elevate your mood and hope, reduce pain and nausea and accelerate healing

Consider establishing a 'laughter library' (following the lead of Norman Cousins (*Anatomy of an illness...*))

Try to see humour in everyday experiences

Social support & connectedness

- **Embrace & invite support**

- Coping with MBC is best done as a 'team' effort. Support can be logistical, medical, emotional and/or spiritual: i.e. whanau, friends, employers, health professionals ...

- **Support forums: online and 'live'**

- Can help further normalise your experience
- You learn from others' coping methods
- You may be inspired and buoyed by others' examples of strength and resilience

Stretching boundaries and comfort zones

- It can be very empowering and liberating to **embrace a different way of being** with less self-consciousness and more 'courage'
- The discomfort or pain of some procedures and symptoms, and embarrassment within some hospital situations can be lessened through conscious effort and/or a change in attitude (**i.e. you can desensitise to them**)
- **Choosing to 'see things differently'** can greatly lessen self-consciousness, build self-esteem, confidence, faith and hope, and improve our abilities to communicate and self-advocate with medical and other people

Living more consciously & purposefully

“We can endure almost anything if there’s a why” – Nietzsche, Frankl ...

- Some people use family events or milestones to forge themselves for coping
- Some people visualise forwards, ‘seeing’ themselves well and active
- Some people plan for and change things so as to live their lives in a way that accords better with their nature & dreams
- Achieving a balance is the way, because living in the present is shown to be the best way to achieve happiness: live for today: plan and take action for tomorrow

Seven key points & takeaway messages: Honing your resilience day-by-day can:

1. Sustain you in many ways - some that couldn't have been imagined
2. Provide you with a healthier sense of control over your circumstances
3. Enable you to be more open and inclusive with your feelings and needs
4. Give you the attitude that you can cope with anything
5. Make you a better communicator, self-advocate, problem solver and decision-maker
6. Enable you to pick yourself up from set-backs
7. Incline you to live your life fully and purposefully, without self-limiting

Questions and comments welcome



About the speaker

Phil Kerlake is a 7-time lymphoma survivor (Hodgkin and non-Hodgkin) whose education in the art, science and practice of coping with cancer and its treatments for best outcomes began over 37 years ago when he was diagnosed with an 'incurable' lymphoma as a teenager. His first symptoms actually appeared when he was a 14-year-old school boy – 42 years ago.

Phil shares what his enquiry, research and personal experience has led him to believe with patients, health care and support professionals. He hopes to help reduce patient suffering and improve outcomes by empowering with knowledge, hope and humour.

Described by the Cancer Council Australia as '*A book that can make a real difference in the lives of cancer patients from all walks of life...*', Phil's patient support book [Life, Happiness... & Cancer](#) (NZ 2006 -) has been New Zealand's most popular patient support resource since 2006 and is in its 5th Print. In NZ the New Zealand Breast Cancer Foundation kindly offers Phil's book as a free resource off its website. Alternatively it can be purchased from Phil off his website for just \$20.

www.lifepaths.co.nz

Phil@lifepaths.co.nz