AntiCancer Lifestyle and the Legacy of Dr. David Servan-Schreiber

Presented by Dr. Lorenzo Cohen and Franklin Servan-Schreiber
Reflections by Ariana Vincent

Have you ever had one of those transformative life-changing events come to you unexpectedly, seemingly out of the blue? Of course. We all have. My friend and colleague, Geri Ruane, called me and asked me if I would like to go to Houston with her to a talk at MD Anderson. All of my previous experiences with MD Anderson have been positive, especially the oncology symposium I attended last year, so I immediately said “yes” to Geri. I went on faith and I came away with vital information focused on nourishing life on every level.

Little did I know that my life would be changed forever. I was introduced to a beautiful philosophy through the vehicle of a book entitled, “AntiCancer – A New Way of Life,” by David Servan-Schreiber.

Dr. Lorenzo Cohen offered compelling information on new research in integrative medicine and cancer research and then David’s brother, Franklin Servan-Schreiber, spoke about his brother’s life and book.

It was easy to see how this model for living would be beneficial for everyone, regardless of his or her state of health.

Here are some excerpts from the AntiCancer website http://www.anticancerbook.com/:

When David Servan-Schreiber, a dedicated scientist and doctor, was diagnosed with brain cancer, his life changed. Confronting what medicine knows about the illness and the little-known workings of his body's natural cancer-fighting capacities, and marshaling his own will to live, Servan-Schreiber found himself on a fifteen-year journey from disease and relapse into scientific exploration and, finally, to health.

Combining memoir, concise explanation of what makes cancer cells thrive and what inhibits them, and drawing on both conventional and alternative ways to slow and prevent cancer, AntiCancer is
revolutionary. It is a moving story of a doctor's inner and outer search for balance; radical in its discussion of the environment, lifestyle, and trauma; and compelling and cautionary in its proposal that cancer cells lie dormant in all of us and that we all must care for the "terrain" in which they exist.

Advocating a sea change in the way we understand and confront cancer, AntiCancer is a radical synthesis of science and personal experience, an inspiring personal journey, and certainly a guide to "a new way of life." AntiCancer tells us:

◊ Why the traditional Western diet creates the conditions for disease and how to develop a science-based anticancer diet
◊ How and why sugar and stress feed cancer and ways to achieve life balance and good nutrition to combat it
◊ Why the effects of helplessness and unhealed wounds affect our ability to restore health
◊ How to reap the benefits of exercise, yoga, and meditation
◊ How to minimize environmental toxins
◊ How to find the right blend of traditional and alternative health care

There is an informative YouTube video that provides a wealth of information, "AntiCancer: A New Way Of Life' / David Servan-Schreiber." The video offers enlightening information about David’s book and life. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVrh-UyyNeg&noredirect=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVrh-UyyNeg&noredirect=1)

"I had cancer," says author David Servan-Schreiber. "I received conventional treatment and the cancer went into remission, but I relapsed after that. Then I decided to learn everything I could to help my body defend itself against the illness. In this book, I'd like to tell you the stories - scientific and personal - behind what I learned."

David, in his book, talks about the importance of taking time to focus on what is it like to be alive in every moment of the day.

In the book, AntiCancer, David quotes Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen on the importance of touch. She says, Touching is a very old way of healing. Touch as a mother would touch a child, because what a mother is
saying through her touch is to 'live.' Something in touching strengthens the will to live in us. Healing is evoking the will to live in another person. It comes about not by doing something but by letting another person know that their pain and their suffering and their fear matter. They really matter.

He also mentions the work of Dr. Tiffany Field. At the medical school of the University of Miami, Tiffany Field, PhD, runs a research institute on massage. Working with Dr. Saul Schanberg's laboratory, her team has shown that three weekly thirty-minute massage sessions of massage slowed down the production of stress hormones and increased the number of NK (natural killer) cells in women with breast cancer. These women were also more serene and felt less physical pain after just the very first session - a well-known effect of massage.

Here are my notes from the presentation...

We began with a lovely meditation by M. Alejandro Chaoul, Ph.D., Adjunct Assistant Professor at MD Anderson Cancer Center. I remembered him fondly from my program last summer in oncology massage. It felt like reuniting with an old friend who is a kindred spirit on the path. The energy in the room shifted after the meditation and everyone became more present and connected.

Dr. Lorenzo Cohen continued the presentation with “The Good News.”

He said that 50% to 70% of cancer could be prevented through appropriate lifestyle choices.

He discussed the focus of the Integrative Medicine Program at MD Anderson: Education, Clinical Delivery and Research and the Psycho-spiritual. We focused on the importance of nutrition, exercise, acupuncture, massage, psycho spiritual care, meditation, yoga, tai chi, music therapy, social network, social connectedness.

It was interesting to learn that the minority of cancers are inherited and the majority of cancers are related to inappropriate gene expression. So, while one might inherit vulnerability, it is the lifestyle choices that are of tantamount importance.
For example, BRCA-1 is the gene for breast cancer; however, research shows that women who consume a variety of vegetables in their diet have a much lower cancer risk. Breast cancer research shows that there is a correlation between a recurrence of cancer and vegetable intake. The higher the vegetable intake, the lower the probability of recurrence of disease.

Cruciferous vegetables in particular are an active component of that vegetable diet; however, non-cruciferous vegetables combined with other vegetables have a synergistic effect and help breast cancer survivors survive longer. DIM is the active ingredient in cruciferous vegetables.

We saw an image of an anticancer plate. It included, among other things, salmon, natural eggs, almonds, ginger, brussel sprouts, whole grain breads, and the meat of animals that ate grass instead of soy. The USDA has dietary recommendations that finally make sense – fruits/vegetables/whole grains/plant and animal protein.

The next topic was the importance of physical activity. It has been discovered that new hormones are released during exercise that break down brown fat in our body, which drives down white fat (harmful fat) in our bodies. Exercise raises brown fat, which raises metabolism, which breaks down white fat.

We learned more about the importance of positive social connections and their relationship to cancer. Negative and competitive social interactions are related to heightened proinflammatory cytokine activity. Research has shown that negative social interactions drive cancer and other inflammatory diseases. Stress can literally get into every single cell and increase the aging process and increase vulnerability.

Dr. Cohen presented information regarding the American Cancer Society Guidelines of Nutrition and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention: Reducing the Risk of Cancer with Healthy Food Choices and Physical Activity. There is a linear relationship between following these 8 guidelines and it will help. The more you do, the better your outcomes.
We heard about a trial focusing on women with stage three breast cancer, which is a very teachable moment, and the positive effects of diet, physical activity, social network and stress management. They monitored the results of this trial by looking at cancer-related pathways via blood analysis.

The point was well made that the combination of Diet/Exercise/Stress Management/Meditation creates is synergistic effect in all of these components. This concluded Dr. Cohen’s part of the presentation.

Franklin Servan-Schreiber now began sharing his insights about his brother David’s life, his book and his philosophy.

David’s story: He had a fist-size tumor removed from the frontal lobe of his brain, iodine seeds were implanted, the recovery took two months, he entered a vaccine treatment (in which there was a forced interaction between white blood cells and tumor), he relapsed in December, he had another small tumor, it was removed in an operation, he had another vaccine treatment, and then he had a fibrous tumor that was inoperable.

He said that chemo for the brain is not effective because of the blood brain barrier. He also shared that brain cancer is not linear; there is a step degradation and then suddenly something goes wrong.

Franklin suggested that we not rely exclusively on what doctors tell you, but to rely on other caregivers also.

He emphasized the importance of talking about issues while you can; don’t wait. For example, talk about issues about death, creating the will and where you want to be buried.

Franklin continued, in March, 2010, an interview was done with David for his book. He was half-paralyzed. He was in an apartment with his mother and there were also four brothers participating in the caretaking.

The book was started on March 15, 2011 and it was published and sold by June 15, 2011 in France. It remained number one for fifteen weeks
throughout the summer in France.

David was still alive when the book became a bestseller. He has not wasted his cancer. The publication brought meaning to his life.

As David’s cancer progressed, he moved to Normandy, where the family had a country house. There was a maid present who had been working for the family for 48 years. She knew David all of his life.

David was an end of life specialist in psychiatry. He knew the various ways in which people died. In the end, David’s digestive system basically shut down. The cancer penetrated the part of the brain that directs the digestive system.

In the process of dying, he listened to his favorite music. He created a collection of music that was 50 songs longs.

Sometimes people want to die alone and this was true for David. The nurse asked the family to step out for ten minutes and this is when David died. He died listening to Mozart’s Piano Concerto Number 23. 

Franklin then read from David’s book:

He read about the AntiCancer method on page 55. He said that there is no doubt that these methods reinforce our natural self-defense system. AntiCancer methods do a great deal of good, diminish side effects, offer longer periods of remission and lower the chance of relapse.

The four aspects of the AntiCancer method are: nutrition, exercise, stress reduction, and social network. With all four you have a chair, with three you have a stool, and with only two you have nothing.

What do you say to someone who is very sick? Listen with your heart and say quite simply, “I’m sorry for what you are going through. Tell me what I can do to help.” Touch them.

During daily visits, prepare for the moment of dying, ask, “Have you thought about what might happen if the treatment is not successful?”

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vttZzUPg3A
Find tricks in the face of fear and deviate the fear – one trick is to minimize pain and discomfort – move to take and use any spiritual help and inspiration you might find. If you believe in reincarnation, talk about that. David found solace in the song of David, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.”

We were encouraged to focus on the concrete – the diet, the medical treatment, get your affairs in order, and redo the will if necessary.

It is also important to enjoy small things – music, movies, laughter. For example, David and his family laughed about the funeral home’s voice mail message, “This is the funeral home, hi, is everything ok?”

Discuss the fear of dying. Many people are afraid of suffering, but not afraid of dying. They are afraid of dying in pain.

The hope of dying well is a very important challenge. After all, every life’s journey ends in death. What is dying well? Saying goodbye to the people, forgiving those you need to forgive, asking forgiveness from the people you need to ask for forgiveness. It is important to feel connected, to feel that your affairs are in order.

Statistics show that one out of two men and one out of three women die of cancer.

Environmental factors are significantly important in relationship to cancer. The earth itself functions as a whole where everything interacts at the same time. We need to affect the root of the problem. Our health is intrinsically linked to our environment. When we heal our planet and we will heal ourselves.

Leave something of yourself that can be felt – the support of unconditional love that is always ready to support, encourage and lead them.

The question arose regarding how to change, especially changing deeply embedded cultural traits. Ben Franklin said to focus on one thing for one week, then move on, then come back.
The question arose regarding drinking wine. Franklin’s response was that the greatest benefit is if you don’t drink at all. If you drink wine, drink organic wine because, for example, one-third of all pesticides used in France are used on grapes. If you drink, drink organic wine with your meal and don’t continue drinking after that. Moderation is critical.

And that concluded our evening presentation.

Afterward Geri and I had an opportunity to talk with Sat-Siri Sumler, the director of the oncology massage program at MD Anderson. I always love being in her peaceful, calming energy. She is a wise, caring and intelligent person who brings a great quality of light into the world through her service and her presence. I am looking forward to participating in the summer workshop again in July and in finding a way to create a niche of service for myself in the MD Anderson’s Integrative Medicine Program. It feels like the right thing to do and the right path to follow.

Here is information about the The Servan-Schreiber/Cohen AntiCancer Fund: MD Anderson Cancer Center is currently seeking philanthropic funding to advance the goals of the Integrative Medicine Program, led by Lorenzo Cohen, Ph.D., professor of behavioral science and general oncology, and to specifically support the development and testing of a novel, comprehensive integrative oncology intervention. The proposed study will build on previous research by examining the effects of an innovative, standardized integrative oncology program based on the model outlined in the book AntiCancer by David Servan-Schreiber, M.D., Ph.D. The study will dramatically move the integrative medicine field forward through several ground breaking strategies where previous research has fallen short.

In addition to the information presented in the AntiCancer book, there is another book of interest by David Servan-Schreiber: Not the Last Goodbye, that you will find interesting and informative.

If you would like to make a donation to the MD Anderson Cancer Center, visit http://tinyurl.com/7dmquvb
If you would like to know more about the Integrative Medicine Program at MD Anderson Cancer Center, visit: http://tinyurl.com/6orp4z4. In addition to the important information on the website, you can subscribe to a variety of electronic newsletters to help keep you informed about the latest advanced in cancer research and integrative health care.

Geri and I had an opportunity to speak with Franklin Servan-Schreiber at the end of the lecture. He mindfully and thoughtfully inscribed our books after taking a moment to get to know us. In my book, he wrote, “For Ariana, To a beautiful caregiver, full of wisdom and generosity.” It meant so much to me that he took a moment to connect on a heart level. The energy was palpable and the experience of that connection was fleeting, but eternally meaningful.

As Maria Robinson once said, Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending. Your future is in your hands, on your plate, in your circle of support, with you as you exercise and in your meditations. Be proactive, empower yourself and integrate the vast knowledge contained in AntiCancer – A New Way of Life by David Servan-Schreiber.