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Beyond Illness, Rewriting the Story of Life

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Abstract

Cancer has long been perceived as a devastating setback. However, advances in medicine and the growth of supportive care are allowing patients to move beyond the limited narrative of "fighting disease" to the more open-ended narrative of "living with illness". Within this new narrative framework, cancer survivors work to bolster their resilience and discover renewed meaning in life. True comeback, no longer defined solely by remission, now also incorporates the ability to draw strength and hope in adversity. The challenge of cancer, extending far beyond pathology and treatment, involves psychological adjustment, family dynamics, and social connectedness. The results of recent studies show positive coping and psychological resources to reduce anxiety and depression significantly and improve overall quality of life (Lai et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2024). Similarly, social support from family and peers plays a decisive role in alleviating isolation and enhancing resilience along the cancer journey (Jiang et al., 2025). Moreover, evidence indicates patient empowerment through shared decision-making and digital health tools improves adaptation and well-being outcomes. As a result of the above, the focus of cancer care has shifted from mere survival to achieving wholeness of life and mental health. In this issue, we explore issues ranging from coherence-based support strategies and the role of nurses in CAR-T therapy to the empowerment experiences of families and patient groups and new pharmacological insights into cellular therapy (Gupta et al., 2024). The articles in this issue collectively underscore a central message -- cancer is not only a medical challenge but also a profound test of our humanity and collective resilience. We hope readers will find in these reflections the transformative power that exists between setbacks and comebacks. Each cancer journey is not an ending but rather a new chapter in the ongoing story of life.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, cancer diagnoses have been burdened by an uncompromising vocabulary of warfare—victories, defeats, battles, and losses. While this framing sought to mobilize psychological endurance, it frequently alienated patients, imposing an exhausting standard of constant combat against one's own body. In contemporary clinical practice, however, the growth of advanced supportive care and precision therapeutics invites a more compassionate evolution: living with illness. Within this refined framework, cancer survivorship is no longer evaluated exclusively through biological metrics of clinical remission, but rather encompasses emotional adaptation, existential exploration, and the capacity to harvest strength and hope from profound adversity (Lai et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2024). Furthermore, social connectedness from family and peers, alongside patient empowerment through digital health tools and shared decision-making, plays a decisive role in alleviating isolation and enhancing resilience along the healing journey (Jiang et al., 2025; Gupta et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, cancer is not merely a biological challenge; it is a profound test of our collective humanity and individual resilience. As medical science continues to push the boundaries of what is therapeutically possible, our humanistic commitments must evolve in parallel. By reframing setbacks

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as gateways to transformative growth, we empower patients to reclaim their narratives, ensuring each cancer journey serves as a courageous new chapter in the ongoing, dynamic story of human life.

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