

Program highlights Chi Kung

Two bone marrow transplants and several rounds of chemotherapy helped save Bob Ellal's life as he faced cancer several times. But he believes these approaches worked with the aid of an ancient Chinese practice known as Chi Kung.

"I went through this process and I shouldn't have survived, but I did," the Connecticut resident said recently at a Dana-Farber program about this form of complementary therapy.

Another former cancer patient, John Kline, said Chi Kung exercises allowed him to continue working through chemotherapy treatments for lymphoma that were expected to knock him out.

"I'm not going to say it's a miracle, but I will say to those people who have cancer, 'You're not always just fighting the disease, you're battling the treatments. This will help you keep your energy and spirits up.'"

Chi Kung, pronounced "Chee Gung," is a system of physical, mental and spiritual exercises designed to improve communication between the mind and body. It is one of several therapies Dana-Farber is exploring to complement conventional treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation.

"Paying attention to complementary therapies is something we should do as oncologists and health-care professionals; we don't have all the answers," says Charles Shapiro, M.D., a physician who practices Chi Kung himself. "We should be aware of these therapies and do research involving them so we can understand

whether or not they are beneficial."

Chi Kung gives patients a way to play an active role in their treatments, Shapiro said. "It increases one's sense of well-being, and some patients will find it empowering."

The therapy focuses on finding balance in five areas: body, mind, breathing, energy and spirit.

"It targets all the layers of our being," explains Ramel Ronés, a Chi Kung instructor who presented a workshop at Dana-Farber on June 25 that drew close to 100 patients, family members, staff and health-care practitioners. The event was part of the Blum Lecture series sponsored by the Eleanor and Maxwell Blum Patient and Family Resource Center.

Chi Kung can help people increase their ranges of motion, lengthen their spines, expand lung capacity, and massage their organs through movement, advocates say. Ronés stressed, however, that Chi Kung shouldn't replace conventional therapies.

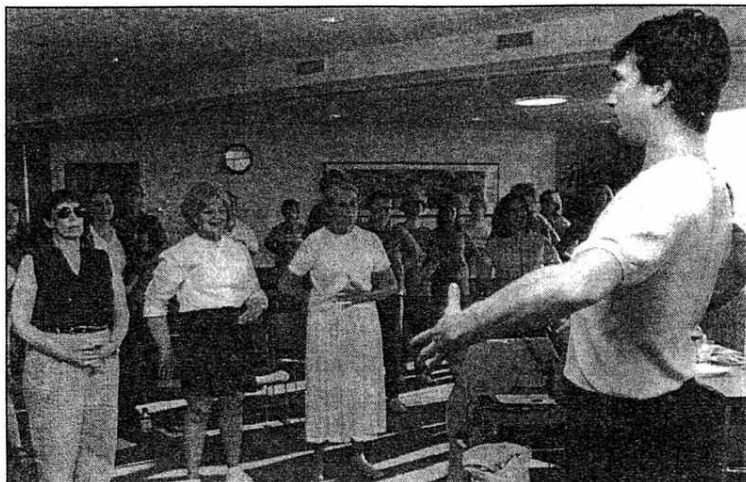
Preliminary studies suggest that Chi Kung can improve certain aspects of the immune system and increase the function of the human body.

Dana-Farber will launch a study this fall under the direction of Paul Richardson, M.D., and colleagues, comparing Chi Kung to a modified exercise program. The study will include patients with breast cancer, prostate cancer and chronic lymphocytic leukemia. It is designed to test for tangible immunological differences and

explore quality of life issues between the two groups.

"The study," Richardson explains, "will help us understand how Chi Kung might be usefully integrated into conventional treatment. It represents part of a broad effort to better define the emerging role of complementary therapies in the care of our patients." ■ JP

Photo by Steve Gilbert



Ramel Ronés (right) offers a workshop at Dana-Farber on Chi Kung, which uses breath and movement to enhance one's sense of well-being.

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