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# Medical Miracle or Spontaneous Remission?

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It is true that some cancers just disappear. Even after weeding out misdiagnoses, and other probable causes, reports of people whose cancers regress or disappear without treatment or with ineffective treatment are documented throughout history.

Alternative medicine gurus have latched on to anecdotal stories of sporadic remissions. They may convince others that the alternative treatment was the cause of remission. Cases of spontaneous cancer remission, however, are so rare that the medical community as a whole remains skeptical and considers it an anomaly when it does happen. Conservative statistics estimate fewer than 25 cancer patients have true spontaneous remissions each year, a paltry number considering the nearly 1.5 million Americans diagnosed with cancer annually.

Still not a topic widely researched, partly because of its rarity and the difficulty of studying the phenomenon after it occurs, spontaneous remissions and regressions have been mostly documented as individual patient reports. Most of the peer-reviewed medical journal reports on spontaneous remission are case studies describing only one patient.

Studies say up to 10 percent of kidney cancers that spread to the lungs spontaneously regress. Other types of cancer that have seen cases of spontaneous regression include melanoma, lymphoma, basal cell carcinoma and childhood neuroblastoma. Although some spontaneous remissions can last for more than five years—one study puts the number at about a third—most of these cancers recur.

Cases of tumors shrinking or disappearing after an infection and fever have led to the theory that the body's immune system may play a factor. Other cases of spontaneous remission follow incomplete surgical removal of cancer, possibly disrupting tumor angiogenesis—a process that feeds the tumor.