

WEB EXCLUSIVES

Bookshelf

BY KATHY LATOUR

Physician as healer.

I think that some of the best information for cancer patients comes from doctor survivors, physicians who have experienced cancer personally and who then relay that information to other patients.

One of the best known in this category is Wendy Harpham, MD, author of six books about cancer. Dr. Harpham was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in 1990 and has since undergone every conceivable issue related to cancer: choosing experimental treatment over conventional, coping with raising small children, living with cancer-related fatigue, experiencing seven recurrences and, finally, having to recognize that her old life as a family practice physician was gone forever, which led her to ask, "What am I going to do for the rest of my life?"

Luckily, she was committed to educating her patients, so when she was first diagnosed she wrote a pamphlet for them about all the things to do when you learn you have cancer. It turned into a book called *Diagnosis: Cancer* that was published, ironically, the month she found out about her first recurrence.

Diagnosis: Cancer was followed by *After Cancer: A Guide to Your New Life*, which provides cancer survivors with questions and issues to address as they move out of treatment and into what Dr. Harpham coined as the "new normal."

Her next book *When a Parent Has Cancer* was an obvious choice. She and her husband, Ted, had been raising three children while "doing cancer," and Dr. Harpham wanted to share all the wisdom about how to help children and parents cope with the experience. Tucked inside the back cover is a children's book, *Becky and the Worry Cup*, written about the experiences of Dr. Harpham's oldest daughter Rebecca. *The Hope Tree: Kids Talk about Breast Cancer* came next. Dr. Harpham co-authored this illustrated children's book with Laura Numeroff to help families talk with their children.

And last year, Dr. Harpham released *Happiness in a Storm: Facing Illness and Embracing Life as a Healthy Survivor*, which addresses survivorship from all

illnesses and provides practical philosophy and science-based knowledge to get good medical care and find happiness while you are sick. Far from an “always stay positive” approach, *Happiness in a Storm* promotes looking realistically at your life and finding ways to make it the best it can be under the circumstances—living each day with as much joy as possible.

For Dr. Harpham, her books have shown one thing: Healing can take place not only in a doctor’s office but in the pages of a book. Authoring books and speaking nationwide about healthy survivorship has become the new normal in her life, which is still filled with uncertainty and cancer. In fall 2005, she experienced her seventh recurrence and has once again exited the other side with new knowledge and wisdom to share information about the “new and improved” immunotherapy she received.

Now on maintenance therapy, Dr. Harpham will present the keynote address at the CURE Patient & Survivor Forum in San Diego this November. Look for the full story on Dr. Harpham and her family dealing with cancer as a chronic disease in this summer’s special survivors issue.