

Forgiveness, Multiple Myeloma, and Other Blood Cancers

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OBJECTIVES

- ✓ Unhealthy anger can compromise health**
- ✓ Forgiveness can cure unhealthy anger**
- ✓ What is forgiveness?**
- ✓ Scientific evidence that forgiveness is beneficial**
- ✓ How do we go about forgiving others?**
- ✓ Toward a randomized, experimental and control group clinical trial for patients with multiple myeloma (or other kinds of blood cancers)**

Unhealthy Anger and the Emotions

Research shows that unhealthy anger (deep resentment that last for months or years) is related to:

- Anxiety that is above normal
- Psychological depression
- Addiction such as excessive alcohol use and other substance abuse
- **Unhealthy anger often is *an effect* of being treated unfairly by other people.**

Enright, R.D. & Fitzgibbons, R. (2015). *Forgiveness therapy*. Washington, DC: APA Books.

Resentment/Excessive Anger Is Common in Psychiatric Disorders

1) In the year 2002, researchers assessed 1,300 adult psychiatric patients across all diagnoses seen at a psychiatric outpatient clinic. About half of these patients, regardless of diagnosis, showed moderate to severe anger (by self report).

Posternak, M.A. & Zimmerman, M. (2002). Anger and aggression in psychiatric outpatients. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 8, 665-672.

2) In the book, *Disruptive Mood*, the authors showed a link between “irritability” (prone to anger or easily angered) and a large number of childhood and adolescent disorders such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, depressive disorders, and others.

Stringaris, A. & Taylor, E. (2015). *Disruptive mood: Irritability in children and adolescents*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Excessive anger/resentment/irritability is common in psychiatric disorders. Is it related to *physical challenges*?

Dr. Pavel Kotoucek of Slovakia, who is a physician in the United Kingdom, approached me in the year 2016. One of his specialties is multiple myeloma cancer.

He was noticing that some of his patients had been harboring deep anger over unjust treatment toward them that went back as far as their childhood.

When these patients told their story of injustice and started to forgive those who acted unjustly, the patients' resentment seemed to go down and the myeloma symptoms began to change. Progression of the disease became slower.

His questions to me: Might unhealthy anger be playing a part in the progression of the disease?

Might reducing/eliminating the unhealthy anger be one aspect in a holistic approach to multiple myeloma cancer treatment?

Unhealthy Anger and Physical Problems

“Extremely low anger scores have been noted in numerous studies of patients with cancer. Such low scores suggest **suppression, repression, or restraint of anger**. There is evidence to show that suppressed anger can be a precursor to the development of cancer, and also a factor in its progression after diagnosis.”

Thomas, Groer, Davis, Droppleman, Mozingo, & Pierce (2000), Anger and cancer: an analysis of the linkages. *Cancer Nursing*, 23, 344-349. (Review of existing research literature)

As early as 1975, researchers were beginning to see a statistically-significant association between **“extreme suppression of anger”** and breast cancer.

Greer & Morris (1975). Psychological attributes of women who develop breast cancer: A controlled study. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 19, 147-153. (Samples size = 160)

“**Anger** also causes the release of the stress hormone, cortisol. Release of this hormone gives the body bursts of energy. However, too much of this hormone can cause a multitude of negative effects on the body. Too much cortisol in the body can cause an imbalance in blood sugar; It can suppress thyroid function, and decrease bone density. This hormonal imbalance also **impacts the body’s immune system**. Research shows that chronic-angry people suffer more frequent colds, flu’s infections, asthma, skin disease flare-ups and arthritis, as compared to non-chronic-angry people (Boerma, 2007).”

Hendricks, Bore, Aslinia, & Morriss (2013). The effects of anger on the brain and body.
National Forum Journal of Counseling and Addiction, 2, 1-12.

Our research team just recently did a statistical analysis of 16,519 patients with myeloma between the years 2011 and 2015.

The outcome variable for the survival analysis was the survival months from diagnosis to the occurrence of death (mortality) due to myeloma.

During the 5 years, the married patients were more likely to be alive than the unmarried patients.

Married patients' survival months were, on the average, 21.7.

Unmarried (not married, widowed, separated, and divorced) patients' survival months were, on the average, 19.2.

Marriage in this study is a surrogate for less conflict, and therefore less resentment (than those divorced, for example).

Serajul Islam MB BS, MSc, MRCP, FRCPath; Chansoon (Danielle) Lee PhD; Jichan Kim PhD; Robert Enright PhD; Pavel Kotoucek, FRCPath (2019, January). Marital Status and Survival in Patients with Multiple Myeloma: The Role of Marriage in the

If we reduce resentment/unhealthy anger in patients who have suffered moderate to severe injustices in their lives, will this improve the immune system and aid blood cancer patients in fighting the progression of the disease?

Is there a cure for resentment/unhealthy anger?

The practice of forgiveness, when a person is treated unfairly by others, ***can reduce or eliminate excessive anger and resentment.***

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What do we mean by forgiveness?

➤ **FORGIVENESS IS A CHOICE**



➤ FORGIVENESS IS A MORAL VIRTUE



➤ **FORGIVENESS
CUTS ACROSS MANY DIFFERENT
PHILOSOPHIES AND RELIGIONS**



DEFINING FORGIVENESS

When we forgive there are three components to the definition:

- We have been treated unjustly by a person or persons.**
- We strive to get rid of the resentment (persistent ill-will).**
- We strive as best we can to offer goodness of some kind to the one(s) who have hurt us. This goodness can take the form of kindness, respect, generosity, or even love.**

FORGIVING IS NOT:

- **Condoning or excusing**
- **Forgetting the injustice**
- **Simply calming down or becoming indifferent**
- **Reconciliation**
- **Abandoning the quest for fairness**



**What is the evidence that
forgiveness
reduces or eliminates
unhealthy anger?**

Examples of Experimental Studies (with Randomized Experimental and Control Groups) in which People Forgive or Learn about Forgiveness

- **Incest survivors.** After 14 months, positive changes in forgiveness (including the reduction in resentment), depression, anxiety, hope, and self-esteem (Freedman & Enright, 1996).
- **Drug rehabilitation.** The forgiveness group became emotionally healthier than the control group, similar to the above study (Lin et al., 2004).
- **Cardiac patients.** Again, the experimental (forgiveness) group became emotionally healthier than the control group. At a 4-month follow-up, the experimental group had more efficiently functioning hearts than the control group (Waltman et al., 2009).

- **Emotionally-abused women.** Results are similar to the above studies in terms of forgiving and emotional health (decreased anxiety, depression, PTSD symptoms, increased self-esteem) (Reed & Enright, 2006).
- **Terminally-ill, elderly cancer patients.** After a 4-week intervention, the forgiveness group showed greater improvement in psychological health (less anger, more hopefulness toward the future) than the control group. Physical indicators of both groups showed declines (Hansen et al., 2009).

HOW PEOPLE FORGIVE



THE PROCESS MODEL OF FORGIVING

PRELIMINARIES

- Who hurt you?
- How deeply were you hurt?
- On what specific incident will you focus?
- What were the circumstances at the time?
- Was it morning or afternoon? Cloudy or sunny?
- What was said?
- How did you respond?

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THE PROCESS MODEL OF FORGIVING

PHASE 1 — UNCOVERING YOUR ANGER

- **How have you avoided dealing with anger?**
- **Have you faced your anger?**
- **Are you afraid to expose your shame or guilt?**
- **Has your anger affected your health?**

CONTINUED

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THE PROCESS MODEL OF FORGIVING

PHASE 1 – UNCOVERING YOUR ANGER (CONTINUED)

- **Have you been obsessed about the injury or the offender?**
- **Do you compare your situation with that of the offender?**
- **Has the injury caused a permanent change in your life?**
- **Has the injury changed your worldview?**

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APA Books.

THE PROCESS MODEL OF FORGIVING

PHASE 2 – DECIDING TO FORGIVE

- **Decide that what you have been doing hasn't worked.**
- **Be willing to begin the forgiveness process.**
- **Decide to forgive. Start by committing to *do no harm* to the one who hurt you (refrain from the negative).**

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THE PROCESS MODEL OF FORGIVING

PHASE 3 – WORKING ON FORGIVENESS

- **Work toward understanding.
(personal, global, and cosmic perspectives)**
- **Work toward compassion.**
- **Accept the pain.**
- **Give the offender a gift. Why? This manifests forgiving as a moral virtue (offering the positives).**

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THE PROCESS MODEL OF FORGIVING

PHASE 4 – DISCOVERY AND RELEASE FROM EMOTIONAL PRISON

- **Discover the meaning of suffering.**
- **Discover your need for forgiveness.**
- **Discover that you are not alone.**
- **Discover the purpose of your life.**
- **Discover the freedom of forgiveness.**

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Toward the Future

1) The next step is a randomized experimental and control group clinical trial, with patients randomized to experimental and control groups.

2) We screen for those patients with a particular form of blood cancer (multiple myeloma):

They have a moderate to severe injustice (or series of injustices against them) some time in their lives, especially prior to diagnosis of the disease.

They still have psychological compromise: heightened anger, anxiety, and depression.

3) Those in the experimental group have a 12-week (or more) intervention in Forgiveness Therapy (with a treatment manual such as *Forgiveness Is a Choice*, published by the American Psychological Association).

This is a once-a-week intervention for about one hour per week.

4) The control group has treatment as usual.

5) Dependent variables include measures of immune system functioning and levels of forgiveness, anger, anxiety, and depression. These are assessed at pretest, after the 12-week Forgiveness Therapy, and at follow-up 12 weeks later.

6) After the first 12 weeks, the control group begins the experiment.

ONE'S FORGIVENESS LEGACY



What will any of us leave behind on this earth
when we die?

Will we leave more anger or more love?