

Next stop, inner peace

Cancer survivor develops Inner Vacations Tool Kits

BY WILFORD S. SHAMLIN • COURIER-POST STAFF • APRIL 24, 2008

Dale Weinert knew exactly where she went wrong.

After a full day's work as physical therapist, the 49-year-old Long Island, N.Y., woman would go home and slip into her role as wife, mother of two and caregiver.

"I was always last on the list and I had to learn to put myself first," Weinert said.

She was constantly in overdrive. She was stressed out and overloaded and multitasking had become a way of life.

Weinert found the courage to take control of her well-being after developing thyroid cancer in 2001. Her diagnosis came about one year after her father died from an aggressive form of renal cancer.

"I've experienced and witnessed how a stressed and overwhelmed mind can have an impact on the body. I wanted to help others recover and cope as well as I did," Weinert said.

"We need to keep everything in balance, promote harmony of the mind and body connection and this, in turn, promotes relaxation and wellness and inner peace. We need to take time out to nurture ourselves and recharge," she said.

That notion, with the support of family and friends, inspired her to create Inner Vacation Tool Kits in 2007. The gift boxes contain inspirational readings, relaxation techniques, helpful suggestions, aromatherapy oils, meditation CDs and other items designed to help put people in a positive frame of mind that can help them overcome negative feelings such as fear, anxiety and loss of control.

They then will be better able to deal with everyday stress, anxiety about undergoing a surgical procedure or coping with a chronic or life-threatening illness, she said.

Dr. Thomas Newmark, chief of psychiatry at Cooper University Hospital in Camden, believes the damaging effects on the body caused by anxiety are the strongest evidence of the link between mind and body.

"We know that a calm mind actually improves the immune system, so having a more calm mind as a result of being relaxed would definitely promote healing. And alternatively, when a person has significant stress, that can certainly have a significant detriment to organs of the body," Newmark said.

Anxiety can induce psychological troubles and a wide range of medical problems, including an irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, difficulty breathing and irritable bowel syndrome.

Weinert said she's living proof that a calm mind promotes overall wellness. The same tools and techniques that she shares in the Inner Vacation Tool Kits are the same ones she tapped in her own recovery.

"The mind is like the conductor to the body. It orchestrates how your body reacts," Weinert said.

So, she practiced relaxing her mind through meditation, yoga and tai chi. Consequently, she focused less on the cancer itself -- a reality that was beyond her control -- and put more emphasis on fighting the disease.

She underwent surgery to have her thyroid removed. Two doctors, working independent of each other, told her she needed no further treatment.

She attributes her recovery to a positive attitude that led "to a calm and peaceful place . . . I would accept whatever I was told and I would find the strength and grace I would need to get through it.

"I was in such a place of balance and harmony that my body was able to take care of what it needed to take care of.

"When you develop your inner strength, you feel like you're on a vacation," Weinert said, explaining how she arrived at the name for her tool kit.

Staying agitated or overly anxious keeps the body in a state of hyperactivity, Weinert said, and the resulting adrenaline rush prepares the body for "fight or flight" and that works against the healing process.

"A lot of illnesses are due to overactive parasympathetic nervous system. It's the part of the body that tries to get you to calm down because you're in this state of emergency," she said.

The tool kits can help people lay a foundation for developing inner-awareness skills that allows them "to go to that place of calmness within you when you're feeling overwhelmed, and this creates balance."

The Inner Vacation Tool Kits were created with the goal of empowering people "to take control of their own wellness. Your whole world turns upside down and the mind is a very powerful influence on how we think.

"You need help to be able to calm your mind down. I hope that's what these kits do, get you into the routine of taking care of yourself," Weinert said.