Cancer Health 25: Lorenzo Cohen, PhD

Demonstrating the power of yoga, tai chi, massage, diet, exercise, acupuncture and other integrative oncology practices

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The Cancer Health 25 is an annual list that honors individuals who have made a difference in the lives of people with cancer. This year's theme is quality of life. To see the full list, click here.

Improving the quality of life and clinical outcomes for people across the cancer care continuum through integrative oncology is a core motivation for Lorenzo Cohen, PhD, 58. So is educating the public about the power of a preventive anticancer lifestyle.

Cohen, the Richard E. Haynes Distinguished Professor in Clinical Cancer Prevention and the director of the Integrative Medicine Program at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, is a founding member (and past president) of the Society for Integrative Oncology.

Cohen leads a team that provides clinical care and conducts research on integrative medicine practices such as meditation, yoga, tai chi, qi gong, massage, diet, exercise, acupuncture and

other strategies, such as stress management, hypnosis, music therapy, emotional writing and more. He is especially interested in examining complementary programs aimed at reducing the side effects of cancer treatment and improving quality of life and clinical outcomes.

He conducted some of the first randomized trials of yoga in cancer patients that showed that yoga helps to improve sleep quality and overall quality of life. Thanks to these early studies and subsequent research by Cohen and others, yoga is now included in oncology clinical practice guidelines.

Cohen's acupuncture research has shown that this important treatment modality can also improve symptoms and quality of life in cancer survivors. With colleagues from the Society for Integrative Oncology, he is trying to transform the standard of care for all people with cancer such that all cancer patients have access to integrative treatment modalities.

Having obtained his 200-hour yoga teacher certification, Cohen also practices what he studies. In a sense, it's a family tradition: His grandmother was the legendary yogini Vanda Scaravelli, whom he counts as an inspiration.

He is also passionate about educating others on how to prevent cancer and maintain optimal health across the life span. The majority of cancers are preventable. Cohen is conducting research to demonstrate that lifestyle factors, including healthy diet, physical activity, stress management, and social support, can influence cancer outcomes.

Cohen has published more than 180 articles in top scientific journals and numerous book chapters. He has also edited two books on integrative medicine for cancer care and coedited the book The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care. With his wife, Alison Jefferies, he wrote the book Anticancer Living: Transform Your Life and Health With the Mix of Six. Anticancer Living provides an accessible, prescriptive guide to wellness based on the latest scientific findings and clinical trials and showcases the community of doctors, researchers, caregivers and patients who are trying to effect change.

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