

Nocebo vs. Placebo?

By Sharon O'Connor, RN

I still remember an article I read many years ago that said many studies showed that the success of a prescribed drug was impacted by the words the doctor spoke when prescribing it. If a patient was told, "This is a miracle drug. It will make you well" it was very likely to work wonders. If, on the other hand, the patient was told, "Let's try this out. If you have..... this will help. Otherwise, we'll try something else" the treatment was likely to fail. I now know that the placebo effect is well documented and shown to have direct and measurable physiological effects.

I've learned about the "Nocebo Effect". In Latin this means "I will harm". This term refers to the adverse effects of expectations about disease, treatments, and pharmaceuticals. A commonly quoted story is one about a man back in the 1970's who first won a bout with cancer. He was later told his cancer had returned and he had only a short time to live. He did pass away at the prescribed time. An autopsy showed that he did in fact have a minute tumor on his liver that did not kill him. He died with cancer rather than from cancer.

In June of this year, a very vibrant, determined young woman, Jessica, was diagnosed with rectal cancer that had already spread to her lungs and liver. Early on, Jessica made the decision that in spite of her doctor's dire predictions, she would survive and live a long and healthy life. The blog her mother created reflects her expectations <http://jessicavictory.blogspot.com/> She agreed to have chemotherapy and chose not to learn about possible adverse reactions. (This information was shared with her mother who could monitor Jessica's well being). She researched and used acupuncture, proper nutrition, guided imagery, and participated in a Tong Ren group led by a healer and acupuncturist for people who were given no hope by their doctors. She was also given my Guided Imagery CD "Cancer Be Gone" by her oncology nurse at Portsmouth Regional Hospital. Six months have now passed and Jessica's primary tumor is completely gone! She remains beautiful, full of life, and her cancer markers are very low. Many would call her a miracle.

A California man was given two of my guided imagery CD's ("Cancer Be Gone" and "Peace of Mind") when he was diagnosed with terminal esophageal cancer. He also chose to have chemotherapy. His course was very difficult but he has been declared cancer free.

How is this possible? Looking at these situations from a practical standpoint, 1. Guided Imagery allows people to sleep at night. This alone is so important. It allows our body to be refreshed and the immune system to be stronger. 2. Guided Imagery reduces stress. The negative impact of stress on the body's ability to heal is very well documented in studies done by Dr. Janet Kiecolt Glaser and many others. 3. The messages and suggestions in guided imagery are encouraging and create feelings of optimism. In

this particular situation, cancer is compared to weeds in a beautiful garden that are easily managed by removal (surgery) or chemicals (chemotherapy) that target only the unhealthy cells.

Let's look at these simple changes in light of our understanding of the mind's functions and power.

Have you ever heard it said that we use only 10% of our mind? This is only partly true. We **have control** of only the 5 or 10% of our mind that is our conscious mind. The other 90 to 95% is on autopilot using our beliefs and expectations to call the shots. The process of guided imagery or hypnotherapy makes changes at the level of the subconscious mind. Limiting beliefs can be reframed.

Let me share a quote from Bruce Lipton, PhD and Steve Bhaerman's new book "Spontaneous Evolution":

"Cells, tissues and organs do not question information sent by the nervous system. Rather they respond with equal fervor to accurate life affirming perceptions and to self-destructive misperceptions. Consequently, the nature of our perceptions greatly influences the fate of our lives."

The takeaway for me is twofold. First, those who practice guided imagery and hypnotherapy need to keep up the good work. Second, huge positive strides could be made in the health care system many now embrace if health care providers used to our advantage the power of the placebo effect by choosing words that truly encourage health and wellness.

Let me ask you this question. In your life, do you choose PLACEBO or NOCEBO?