

FRONTIER

Stories of Hope

The call came several days ago. Close friend. Cancer. Not again...

I am overwhelmed by what feels like an epidemic of cancer—and by fear, sadness, and the potential loss that I associate with the “C” word. A diagnosis of cancer is unquestionably an overwhelming trauma. But how we respond to the diagnosis may be predictive of the choices we make about this disease and how it ultimately impacts us. Whether with defense or surrender, each of us responds in our own unique way. As I consider all the friends I know who’ve fought a noble battle with this frightening foe, some living well beyond what the numbers would predict, my mind turns in another direction. Hope.

Webster’s Dictionary defines hope as a “desire accompanied by expectation of, or belief in, fulfillment.” Hope offers an alternative to hopelessness, which is defined as “having no expectation of good or success, despairing, not susceptible of remedy or cure, incurable, desperate, impossible.” There is little doubt that hope can be of immeasurable value to people facing life-threatening disease. But are there grounds for such optimism?

To answer, we need only consider those people who have somehow beaten the odds. Just as some people succumb to disease more rapidly than average, some live much longer than the mean. What about these survivors? Do they give us reason for hope? What can we learn about healing from individuals who represent the positive end of a probability distribution? Can we learn to be survivors?

Such questions have been on the mind of Caryle Hirshberg for more than twenty years. This researcher began at IONS by collecting cases of spontaneous remissions, in partnership with her friend and colleague, Brendan O’Regan. “We believed that if human beings

Exploring the frontiers of consciousness:

IONS’ research pushes the boundaries.

possess usually untapped powers of self-repair that can affect the dissolution of a tumor, it is of vital importance that it be investigated and understood.”

As word got out that the researchers were collecting information on remission and extended survival, IONS began to receive mail. One letter came from a woman who was diagnosed with lung cancer. Her letter began, “I’m so grateful that research is being done in the area of spontaneous remission. . . . Statistics gave me 6-8 months without treatment, but only 18 months with treatment. That was six years ago. . . . Even in your research in medical journals, you will still miss a lot of us who are surviving quite happily and with an insight that has to come when one looks death in the eye.”

Today, research on spontaneous remission and extended survival has gained some momentum. Programs are underway across the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia. In Germany, for example, investigators are continuing to collect cases of remissions and extended survivors—hoping to find patterns across the isolated reports. An updated summary of O’Regan and Hirshberg’s work, *The Spontaneous Remission Bibliography*, is now available in a searchable online database on the IONS website (www.noetic.org). And more interest has developed in approaches that facilitate healing, rather than restricting the focus to disease.

Of course, there are no easy answers, no fixed set of behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, or personality characteristics that predict survival. And yet, it is clear that each person can and does influence the outcome. As pointed out by

S O F R E S E A R C H



DREW GALLOWAY. PHOTO: JEANNE CLAYTON

‘Hope is a
waking dream.’

—ARISTOTLE

Hirshberg: “If psychosocial factors can account for, for instance, even 5% of the equation of success, that 5% may be sufficient to make a difference between recovery and death.”

What have we learned from these various studies and case collections? In a search for patterns, researchers have identified similarities in how survivors account for their hopeful situations. Such similarities do not represent a recipe for survival, but illuminate a set of possibilities. Some of these patterns are outlined here:

■ Many people demonstrate a strong sense of self-sufficiency, and an internal locus of control. They feel in charge. Commitment and self-efficacy pervade their beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes. For example, after being informed he had a grave prognosis following a diagnosis of metastatic pancreatic cancer, one man—after a period of depression, fear, sorrow, and loss—rallied and exclaimed, “That’s what they say, now let me see what I can do.”

■ Most survivors give greater weight to intangible factors, such as attitude changes, new meaning in life, an

enhanced appreciation for nature, and strong connections to partners, friends, and health practitioners, than to the treatments they received.

- Many people report that a strong, supportive, and trusted relationship with one other person, a partner, was considered extremely significant.

- Spiritual faith, religious conviction, belief in and surrender to a higher power are prominent in many survivors' stories. Some report that prayer, either their own or the prayers of others, contributed significantly to their survival.

- Flexibility and a willingness to try anything that makes sense, or to make changes when something doesn't seem to be working, characterized many people's approach.

- People report that they no longer feel it is necessary to deny their feelings. One minute fearful, the next joyful, the full gamut of emotions is acceptable to them.

Survivors also display increased appreciation for humor and more uninhibited laughter.

To date, much of medicine has focused on the degenerative aspects of cancer. But what about our mysterious capacities to heal, even in the face of adversity? While remission remains the exception to the rule, there is much to learn from the survivors of cancer that may lead to the creation of new treatment programs and to the very redefinition of the outcomes of cancer. We need only recall the prophetic words of Paracelsus, the "Father of Modern Medicine," who said, "Ills of the body may be cured by physical remedies or by the power of the spirit acting through the soul."

If one can choose, I choose hope.

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Serendipity and Paradox



One of the joys of conducting basic research is encountering the unexpected. Occasional serendipities are more than delightful, they are actually essential to the lifeblood of science. Without surprises, scientific theories risk congealing into dogma.

A discovery I recently ran into (or perhaps it ran into me) provides unanticipated support for the effects we previously observed in the Global Consciousness Project's (GCP) worldwide network of electronic random number generators (RNG) on September 11, 2001. I described those results to IONS members in an article entitled "For Whom the Bell Tolls" (*IONS Review* #63). The GCP runs dozens of RNGs 24 hours a day, in many major cities worldwide. The GCP is a type of mind-matter interaction monitor for events of mass interest. Headed by Dr Roger Nelson of Princeton University, the project postulates that during moments of high mental coherence among groups of people, the state of physical randomness will fluctuate, and these changes are detectable in the worldwide RNG network. So far, the evidence supports a genuine mass mind-matter interaction,

including some particularly striking effects on 9/11. There are several interpretations of how these connections may arise and what they might mean; you can read more about them at the GCP's website at <http://noosphere.princeton.edu>.

The background of the serendipity is as follows: In September 2000, when I was working at the Boundary Institute (www.boundary.org), I developed a series of simple web-based tests to allow people to easily test their psi abilities and to compare their performance to others. Those games can be found at www.gotpsi.org. When I joined the IONS Research Department in 2001, I designed a new set of online psi games located at www.psiarcade.com, and they too continue to attract hundreds of people every day.

Together, these two suites of online psi tests have collected more than 60 million individual trials from more than 200,000 people. These datasets represent one of the largest systematic collections of psi data ever amassed, and they provide new ways of studying these abilities.

The specific test I was examining was a simple ESP card test on the gotpsi.org site. The webpage for this test

presents an image with the backs of five playing cards. The user's task is to guess which card the computer will select immediately after the user makes his or her decision. This is thus a precognition test with immediate feedback. One trial involves the user making a decision and the computer randomly selecting a card and displaying it. One run in this test consists of 25 trials. Users can perform as many trials or runs as they wish. If they produce at least one run in a given day, their results appear in a daily "Hall of Fame," ranked by their performance.

The data for gotpsi.org's ESP card test from August 29, 2000 through May 31, 2004, shows that an average of 12,400 individual trials were contributed daily by dozens to hundreds of people. The data of interest were the total number of trials and hits contributed per day. Over the nearly 4-year period I was examining, there were just over 17 million trials.

To visualize each day's performance on this test, I calculated a measure that determines the degree to which the daily hit rate deviated from chance expectation (called a "z-score"). These scores typically range between ± 2 ; rarely do they drift beyond ± 3 . Positive z values correspond to users correctly selecting the ESP card targets more often than expected by chance, and negative z values correspond to systematically missing the targets.

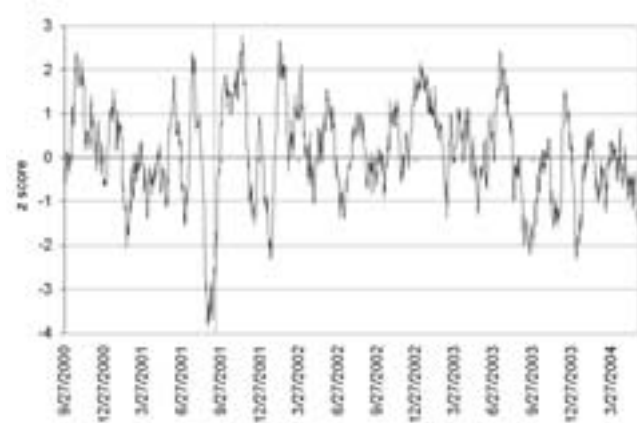
To make it easier to visualize slower moving trends, I determined z-scores representing the overall performance observed for days 1 – 30, 2 – 31, and so on. This 30-day "sliding window" graph is shown at right. Notice that most of the curve resides between z-scores of ± 2 , as expected. But at one point the curve drops almost to -4 , and it stays there for about two weeks. Statistically speaking the depth of this drop is most unexpected. But even more surprising was that the dotted vertical line in the graph corresponds to September 11, 2001.

The time-correspondence is visually striking. To see if this might have been a coincidence, I determined the probability of finding a curve as low as was observed within two weeks of a specified date. The answer was $p = 0.0002$; in other words, only one time in 5,000 occurrences of similarly constructed databases would we expect to see a drop of a similar magnitude within 14 days

of 9/11. To put this into perspective, recall that this database represents about four years of data, thus we'd potentially have to wait four years times 5,000 repetitions, or nearly 20,000 cumulative years, to obtain a curve like this purely by chance.

What might this result mean? One speculation is that since the curve becomes strongly negative prior to 9/11, it may represent a collective *repression* of psychic ability.

'This propitious observation suggests a new way of studying collective intuition.'



Daily combined z-scores from 30-day "sliding windows," reflecting performance in the www.gotpsi.org ESP card test. The vertical dotted line corresponds to September 11, 2001.

Repression allows us to hide from ourselves facts or feelings that are too painful to acknowledge. The hundreds of users taking this test may have been unconsciously avoiding their intuitive impressions of the events about to unfold, and as a result they also actively avoided hitting the target. While such an explanation is pure speculation at this point, this propitious observation suggests a new way of studying collective intuition.

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