

A Journey That Can Save Your Life

By Loretta Siani, Ph.D.

You can go on an inner journey through your entire body that can save your life. A few short months ago I went to a CT imaging center with my best friend and her brother to get what is commonly called a “body scan” and I went on one such life-saving, inner journey.

The “body scan” takes a high-resolution diagnostic picture of the inside of the body from neck to pelvis and is state of the art, preventative medicine at work. My friend, whose name is Lety, wanted to do this, not because she felt ill, but rather because she wanted to coax her older brother Carlos into being more proactive about his health. Besides that her family physician, Dr. Susan Sleep who is on staff at Long Beach Memorial Hospital and St. Mary’s Medical Center, had encouraged her to get the body scan in order to achieve and maintain optimal health. So Lety booked an appointment for herself and her brother and one for me too so that I could go along as everyone’s moral support.

To everyone’s surprise, Carlos received a clean bill of health. For Lety and me it was another story. My body scan revealed the beginnings of osteoporosis. This news wasn’t too bad since this is a condition that can be treated with calcium supplements and regular exercise. But Lety’s body scan revealed a condition that, had it gone undiagnosed, would have been life threatening in very short order.

The body scan saved Lety’s life because it revealed a tumor the size of a walnut in the apex of her right lung. A team of Long Beach doctors ultimately diagnosed this tumor as a stage one cancerous tumor called a Pancoast. If it had gone undiagnosed, as these tumors usually do until late stages when they present symptoms of pain in the arm, elbow, hand and eye, the prognosis for Lety’s life span would have been a short five years. But since it was caught in the early stages by virtue of the body scan, Lety’s chances of a complete recovery with no reoccurrences, and a normal life span are about seventy percent.

A lot of people are fearful of having these body scans done, saying they’d rather “not know.” But as you can see from this story, the body scan is a life saving diagnostic tool that gives people the information they need to lead a healthier, longer life. Here’s how Lety used her body scan to get a jump-start on the road back to health.

After the consultation with the doctors at the CT imaging center Lety brought her body scan pictures to Dr. Sleep. Dr. Sleep reviewed the scan and recommended Lety to pulmonary specialist Dr. Richard Rucker of Long Beach. Dr. Rucker ordered a needle biopsy and the needle biopsy confirmed that the tumor was indeed cancerous. From there Dr. Sleep sent Lety to Dr. Cynthia Forsthoff, a renowned oncologist here in Long Beach. Dr. Forsthoff ordered more tests including additional CT scans, bone scans and a PET scan to confirm the diagnosis.

In the process of all of this, the good news was that the cancer had not spread to any other part of Lety's body. Dr. Forsthoff next sent Lety to see Dr. Nisar Syed, Medical Director of the Long Beach Memorial Radiation and Oncology Center. Together Dr. Forsthoff and Dr. Syed determined to give Lety an aggressive course of treatment given that she is relatively young (52) and in otherwise good health. Aggressive treatment meant approximately six weeks of radiation *and* chemotherapy followed by surgery to remove any remnant of the tumor.

Since I am Lety's best friend, and also a Doctor of Clinical Hypnotherapy, I went along with her to act as her advocate and help her relax during her radiation and chemotherapy treatments. Radiation was administered at the Long Beach Memorial Radiation Oncology Center and chemotherapy was administered at the Hematology and Oncology Consultants Center (Dr. Forsthoff's office) also in Long Beach.

Lety can't say enough good things about the high level of care she received from the doctors, nurses and technicians in both centers. She says that the compassionate, cheerful care given at the Radiation Center by Waldo Gusman, Maricela Armendarez, Cheryl Brady and Esther Miolitis and at the Onconcoly center by Margarath (Mo) Scarborough, Smantha Thienes and Kathy Sprinkle, made it so much easier for her to relax and remain positive about getting back on the road to health.

In spite of the fact that Lety received outstanding care, and the fact that she is a naturally positive, happy person who places absolute faith in God and in the treatment prescribed by her doctors, she still has anxiety about certain things. Namely the molded mask that she had to wear on the radiation table in order to hold her head perfectly still during treatment, made her very anxious and claustrophobic. To help her overcome this anxiety I taught her a simple yet highly effective relaxation technique. I also taught her a visualization technique to use in combination with her chemotherapy treatments. Deep relaxation and visualization techniques have been clinically demonstrated to produce remarkable healing effects and are recommended today by more and more health care professionals. Below is an outline of the mental imagery that I taught Lety to use for relaxation and healing.

Relaxation Exercise to Reduce Anxiety:

Profound levels of relaxation are reached through concentration or focusing of the mind - - the deeper the concentration the deeper the relaxation, and of course the deeper the relaxation the less the anxiety that is experienced. Holding the attention on an external or internal point of focus is one method of attaining deep concentration. This point of focus could be a candle, a mantra, the breath or an image held in the minds eye. Here is the simple but very effective relaxation technique that I taught Lety to use

1. Close your eyes. Put your attention on your breathing as you take in a deep breath and let it out slowly.
2. Feel your entire body expand as you inhale and contract as you exhale for three complete breaths.

3. Now in the center of your mind picture the number 100 as if on a screen or board. See the number lit up and glowing with a brilliant white light. See it as perfectly and as clearly as you possibly can. In the mind's ear, hear yourself say the number. Hold your attention on the number as you say it to yourself for two seconds.
4. Now see the number 100 fade to the number 99. See the number 99 in a brilliant emerald green. Picture the number as perfectly and clearly as you can. Hear yourself say the number. Hold this image for two seconds.
5. Continue counting backwards in this manner down to zero alternating the number's colors from brilliant white to brilliant emerald green and listening to yourself say the number.
6. Holding your internal gaze on the numbers in this way will produce profound relaxation. It did for Lety and she was able to go through her radiation therapy without any anxiety.

Visualization Exercise to Promote Healing

Visualization engages the mind to interact with its point of focus, deepening concentration. Here is the mental imagery I taught Lety to use to supplement the healing effects of her chemotherapy treatment. Of course these suggested images were adapted by her and used in her own fashion.

1. Close your eyes. Put your attention on your breathing. Notice the gentle rising and falling of your chest and abdomen as your body begins to relax and find its rest. (Use the counting backwards technique to reach a deeper state of relaxation.)
2. Once deep relaxation is reached imagine your chemotherapy entering your body as a glimmering, brilliant stream of powerful white light.
3. See this white light proceeding to your tumor and penetrating it until it becomes completely immersed by the powerful, white light.
4. Now picture the tumor, which is very weak, pulsating with the brilliant, powerful white light that you now realize is the light of love. Now see the light of love form into the wing's of an angel inside the tumor. See the angel's wings burst out of the tumor breaking it up into millions of pieces.
5. Observe your white blood cells rushing to carry away the pieces of the tumor and watch as they get flushed out through your liver and kidneys and eliminated in your stool.

6. Now imagine yourself totally well and free of all cancer. See yourself, as if on a movie screen, experiencing health, happiness and all that you desire. Notice what you look like. Observe your body. See how it stands; breathes. Hear the sound of your voice. Hear what others say to you as you experience your restored health and happiness.
7. Now watch and listen to yourself through the eyes of someone who loves you. Hear them praise you as they observe your health and happiness.
8. Step into the picture. Look out at the world through your eyes. Become keenly aware of any bodily sensations, tastes or aromas associated with your restored health and happiness. Hear your inner dialogue. Notice how you feel connected to others. Feel the joy and love present in your heart.
9. Now, step back out of the screen and observe yourself again. Send yourself a shower of golden light. Let it fill your being. Hold this image until it naturally fades. Open your eyes knowing that you are entitled to the miracle of healing.
10. Practice this imagery during chemotherapy. Practice it also three other times during the day and just before falling asleep at night.

These are the relaxation and visualization techniques that Lety used in combination with her conventional medical treatment to successfully complete her radiation and chemotherapy treatment and all the other tests she had to go through. On July 15, she will undergo surgery by Long Beach thoracic surgeon Dr. Douglas McConnell. At that time she will use more mental imagery and deep relaxation techniques to help her body heal from the surgery.

Lety's family and friends and I look forward to her complete recovery. They also join with me in inviting each of you to not be afraid to take an journey through your entire body. Get a body scan. It really can save your life.