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THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

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Last August I wrote an article describing the research journey and validate research to see if spiritual healing can help ease the side effects of breast cancer treatments. I also described the journey women with breast cancer have to undertake. It is a journey that dramatically changes their planned life course, leading them into unknown territory. It is a long pathway with many twists and turns, filled with fear and anxiety, where the destination is not guaranteed. I am writing now to let you know how far we have travelled since August.

Healing for the study is provided by healers from Harry Edwards Healing Sanctuary, who every Friday travel to the Wellcome Clinical Research Facility in Southampton General Hospital. The staff at Wellcome have always been helpful and there has been a growing interest in our study. Indeed a couple of the nurses have 'tried' healing for themselves, when there has been a gap in the study appointments.

Whilst we have encountered some resistance to the study and it has been difficult to recruit patients, we do have enough patients now and a majority of them have completed their course of healing. The women have ten healing sessions and during their time on the study they keep a daily log of their experiences, which gives a very detailed picture of what it is like to live with breast cancer and how the healings affect them.

At the end of their course of healings they have an interview with me, where we review their experiences. It is such rewarding work for me to sit with these brave women and listen as they tell how breast cancer invaded their lives and how spiritual healing has impacted on them. Once these interviews have been transcribed, I produce a synopsis which I send back

to the patient for them to check and change anything they are not happy with. This synopsis will be used to introduce each patient in my thesis and I feel it is important that each woman should be happy with the words I use and what I say about them.

Whilst we are coming to the end of the first phase of the research, the research continues and the second phase of the study is now underway. In this next phase I have been joined by two associates and together we have run focus groups with the women from my study and also with people who have attended The Sanctuary for healing. The focus groups give us an opportunity to look at the impact of spiritual healing for different patient groups.

It is strange to reflect how much we use language and yet, how difficult it can be to fully describe feelings, sensations and emotions. The focus groups help us to find a vocabulary to use in the development of our questionnaire on spiritual healing. The creation of the healing questionnaire is important for the final stage, as we will use it to give us a statistical analysis of the impact of spiritual healing.

Since I last wrote the study has attracted interest from other spiritual

magazines, the local newspaper and researchers in other countries who have contacted me. I have also presented the study to the International Congress on Complementary Medicine Research held last month in Sydney, Australia and I have plans to present the study at several other conferences in the UK in the next few months. The study has also been published in the Journal of Complementary and Alternative Medicine which is an international journal. So, although there has been a lot of work actually doing the research, the study has generated interest from several external sources, which is very exciting.

I conclude this update with a few words of recognition and thanks to all those involved in the study: To the breast cancer patients who have so generously allowed me into their lives and shared their most personal experiences with me and to the healers who have generously given their time and their support, to me and to the study and who have made my work so much easier - Thank you.

Keep an eye on your letterboxes as we will soon be sending our questionnaires to people who have received healing at The Sanctuary. If you do find our questionnaire in your post, please fill it in and send it back in the envelope I will enclose. Your views will help us in our study.

I will be presenting my research at the Harry Edwards Open Day in June and look forward to meeting you there.