Food As Medicine: How Plants Can Transform Cancer Care Transcript

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Introduction and Guest Background

Hello everybody, and welcome to our Cancer Solutions Summit. And today we have a wonderful opportunity to be with a dear friend of mine, a phenomenal doctor, Doctor Ryan Wise from new Jersey.

And he is dual board certified and internal medicine and lifestyle medicine. He's a primary care physician, the executive director of Ethel's Primary Care and assistant professor of clinical medicine at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, and his website for his practice is Ethel's Primary Care.

And he's also a botanist and a farmer. He really puts together food. Is medicine better than any living doctor today? It's just amazing. And he's he's been written about in New York Times, New York Post, the Today Show, new Jersey monthly, part of the documentary Eating You Alive.

And we're really excited to have you with us today. All right. And he's also a a super kind and warm person and just wonderful doctor. Okay, Brian. Well, thanks for joining us.

And, let's hear about you know, I know we're going to have a lot of important information to give people today that's going to benefit them. But before we start with some of that, I know you how you got into this.

You got into this because I think when your father got cancer, right. And yeah, I knew was a conventional doctor just practicing regular medicine before that.

Exactly. I well, you know, I had I was actually really practicing because I, I was training I was in medical school. I went to Rutgers, new Jersey medical School, you know, an academic training.

I then did internal medicine at, residency at George Washington University in D. C., an academic training. And you know, I never learned anything about nutrition or anything.

And that lifestyle, it was all drugs, you know, hospitals, procedures, surgeries, that's it. Chemo. And then about, about after I graduated, I actually started a, I went to you're you're current.

I want to go to film school at a University of Southern California, to get a master's in fine arts, because I have a background in I have a degree in.

And, I wanted to compose, and I was I was not going to give up being a doctor. I was, practicing out there. And while I was out there, my father was suddenly diagnosed with end stage pancreatic cancer.

Stage four. Most of his liver had been replaced by the tumor.

Father's Cancer and the Shift to Plant-Based Healing

I came home, and, we, we were all devastated. I took him we because, there were my two older brothers are also physicians. All the boys took him to the best cancer hospital in the world.

And, he was basically given, a bleak prognosis and told to get his affairs in order. Maybe having, you know, 60 days left now in two months, three months that that was that he was at the end and, I, I moved him back into the house to help take care of him.

And devastated, we went to I didn't know what to do, because I had given a lot of chemotherapy for stage four pancreatic cancer, and I knew what the end of that story was. So, I found by going to going to the public library, I found a book on testimonies of cancer survivors.

And this book had been published by Michio Kushi, who was the head of the macrobiotic movement, which is a it's a branch of plant based eating whole plant foods.

And, and so there was a man in that book whose name was Norman Arnold, who had the exact same, stage four pancreatic cancer my father had and he'd survived and, and gone into complete remission.

And and he lived for many years. He, he actually founded today in down at the University of South Carolina School of Public Health. I taught I read this story to my father and he said, okay, I will do what he did.

And we took my father to meet Yoku shave. He placed him on a in extremely severe and restricted, died of whole plant foods. And my father had a regulatory experience.

He very quickly, within days all his severe abdominal pain was gone. He was going to the bathroom. He got a of as narcotic. He was an attorney. He went back to his law practice within the week he started, he went back to the gym two weeks later, was running a few weeks later.

Three months later, we got a Cat scan to, check his, status. It turns out that he had a reduction by one third of all his tumor masses. Six months later, we got a follow up Cat scan, 50% reduction.

So, you know, a year later, we took him back to the cancer hospital. The same doctor and, the doctor was shocked to see him still alive. We had gone to see if there were maybe any trials that were open or some new, new, discoveries that had been made where we started to tell my father, started to tell the doctor that he was eating seaweed and brown rice and kale and broccoli and root vegetables.

The doctor lost complete interest and changed the topic to chemotherapy. So when you father never father never got the chemo, never got chemo? No, he never took it.

It was five fluorouracil which had an 85. It was the only one available. It had an 85% no response rate. And the 15% response maybe would give you an extra few weeks at a time and making you sick.

So my father decided to. Yeah, most people don't realize that chemo, the advantage chemo gives you is so slight and it ruins you quality of life that in most cases of cancer, it's not worth it.

Absolutely right. And, we can discuss this in a little bit. What I have had since then with the patients and I'm sure you I know you have, too. Is that, that, even, even if you get chemo, even if there is there a case can be made in specific cancers for chemo to be given because, and there not that many, but there are some cases and especially sometimes with immune, you know, these immune therapies that there there are new currents in, in cancer treatment where lives can be significantly extended.

I have seen that, the plant eating of whole plant foods, definitely improves performance status and performance status is sort of the carrying capacity that a cancer patient has during his or her illness.

How how robust or how vital is the cancer patient? What reserves does the cancer patient have that will enable them to survive as long as possible or potentially overcome the cancer?

That's called the performance status. And I've noticed that eating plant foods, no matter what you do, whether you're getting chemo or whether you're not accepting chemo, definitely improves performance status.

What is your do you have a similar view on that? Well, yes. I mean, there are certain cancers that are very aggressive, such as a, a rapidly growing, pre-menopausal breast cancer or a type of leukemia.

There are chemo is necessary, but otherwise death will ensue. And the more aggressive cancers that require chemo, the chemo works better for an aggressive cancer because the cells are rapidly dividing.

And when they rapidly divide so rapidly, they expose the DNA for the damage. But these slow, indolent cancers like

popcorn variety, breast cancer and prostate cancer don't respond to chemotherapy because their cells are growing slowly and they're not going to be vulnerable.

And the chemo is probably going to cause other harm. And a little bit of benefit you get isn't even worth it.

Chemo, Performance Status, and Cancer Outcomes

It's better to just focus on lifestyle and nutrition. Most common cancers, you know, you're going to be living whatever life you do have left. You're going to be living it with severe pain in your feet or you know, yeah, other kinds of, you know, terrible side effects usually are nausea or vomiting or other kinds of and then the aggressive, the other kinds of things that, that are the, you know, the outcomes of often of chemotherapy.

Right. And with like metastatic ovarian cancer with a big mass or something, you know, chemo might be indicated, but the people still die of the recurrence because the chemo doesn't kill all the cancer cells.

And those cancer cells that grow back are now resistant to chemo and they die, you know, 3 to 5 years later. But there's where nutrition really plays a role.

It can't the bulk the major mass of the tumor in every case. But what it does when you after chemo, the body's immune surveillance is heightened by the excellent nutrition.

And then the cells that have escape now can be killed by the body's own immune system and to prevent recurrence of the cancer. So even when chemo is used, it makes a major difference in preventing the what usually causes death, which is a recurrence of the original cancer.

Yeah. You know, I don't I don't think we've discussed this case, but I have a very, a wonderful gentleman now who is a suffering from end stage. Well, he had widely metastatic prostate cancer, throughout his skeletal system.

When, and, when he first came in, the bone scan basically showed most of his, skeleton was replaced by tumor instead of bone. And he is entering his sixth year, having, a, sort of, undergone hormonal manipulation therapy, with, Lupron and other other kinds of, therapies, not chemo, because chemo doesn't work for prostate cancer, but and, and by taking drug holidays, sometimes getting the therapy, he's kind of arranged his own schedule and, and he's been dedicated to a high level of whole plant foods.

He's entering his sixth year. And at this time, there is no sign of any cancer in his bones. It is unbelievably crazy. You know, I had a case like that, too.

Her name was Lee Gertz. That a patient of mine back in the 99, in the 90s where she had metastatic breast cancer to her bones. And she didn't take emotion to anything.

She just said, if I die, I die. I don't want to be suffered with chemotherapy and have a crap quality of life. And she did everything I told her to the to the my newest detail with the juicing and using sprouts and everything.

And she and I got the bone scan. She was doing so well. I repeat the bone scan. The cancer disappeared out of her bones and I said to that I had to call the radiologist and say, you must have mixed up the patients because she has metastatic bone lesions, you know, and they're gone.

And so he repeated it again and he got the, you know, and it was obviously she made a complete recovery from metastatic breast cancer that had gone to her bones.

And I was just like, wow, this is unbelievable. You know, I would say that is I would say, I would say for the majority of patients I see, though, we have to usually for late stage cancer patients or mid-stage cancer patients, most of them are up to get conventional treatment.

So I have to because, they are, you know, they generally decide to go down the road of, you know, conventional

oncology treatment. So, so much pressure to do it.

There's so much pressure to do chemo. It's crazy. But in many of them I am I am left, you know, I so I try to support them those patients the best I can with the with you know, a, high, high quality plant diet.

So, you know, I, I was just meeting with a lady yesterday. Who? And quite frankly, based on what you're saying, I, you know, we generally know what happens when people the conventional diet and get conventional chemotherapy with stage four cancers.

How often does it work? Yeah, it doesn't doesn't work out for them. So yesterday I had a, I was seeing a lady who had, stage four ovarian cancer metastatic to the axillary lymph node.

Is just past her fifth year. No signs of cancer. She got conventional treatment. But she as well adopted, you know, a high quality plant based diet. And, you know, I was trying to ask her, you know, it's a complex question.

What component of the treatment was responsible for? Why are you still alive today? And, you know, I would have to say if I had to choose. And, of course, you know, human biological systems are so complex.

There's so many there's so many things that enter into who we are, why we are alive, why we are healthy. Yeah, sure. As exercise and sleep and all these things.

But in my book, it's the plants, it's the plants. And, and I get I derive this, this intuition from my father. The and you know, back it when my father's experience occurred in the 90s.

No, we didn't really have a lot of science to explain why this had occurred.

Plant Quality, Phytonutrients, and Soil Health

My father's cancer case, occurred about three years before Judah Folkman first. And, announced, first brought out his research on veggie inhibitors, and Hal from, from Harvard and how, the veggie inhibitors, you know, which are in effect, phytonutrients, plant phytonutrients help to, corral and control cancer cell growth, by preventing their initiation spread or, their growth, their tumor growth.

And so after that came out and, all the additional research on, you know, plant based nutrition and, you know, it's we have so much information which if you'd like to discuss as to the mechanisms of why, why people who are eating plants can do well and why they can overcome their diseases, because we actually know why today or have strong we have strong leanings as to why this can occur, right?

Why the body develops the ability, certain food elements, that we can design a dietary portfolio to be high enriched in those elements to improve cellular concentration.

That will enable the immune system to function at a high level of normalcy. It's just normal, which allows the immune system to surveil abnormal cell surfaces, remove abnormal cells, cause apoptosis and death of abnormal cells that people who eat conventionally have handicapped their immune system.

So it can't protect them anymore. We'll just we'll just, we'll just reinvest. We're reawakening normal immunity that we all should have. And this normal immunity has the ability to protect us against cancer.

Even when cancer cells, you know, right now there there are new drugs that do that. These checkpoint inhibitors, they sort of tap your immune cells on the shoulders.

They wake up. That's a cancer cell. Kill it. But I think, you know, what you're talking about is, you know, a lot of these checkpoint inhibitors, they have you know, they you can go into liver failure, taking them you'll never go into liver failure from, you know, eating and eating broccoli sprouts.

Yeah. Yeah. Well, if you eat, maybe they eat. Maybe a couple of pounds of them. You will. But yeah, right. It's like as long as you eat, you know, a judicial of that.

And I think you and I are like the, the, the people who think the most about not just the eating the plants, but the, the quality of the plants, the quality, the growth of the plants and the type of plants to really design the diet, to give it that ability to have more efficacy.

Because when really taking that level nutrition to that high level, you know. Exactly. And that's why I think we we have a connection. You and I, because you understand plant quality and that the way a plant is grown determines, the degree of its power and helping you not all not all kale is the same.

It depends on how the kale is grown. Does the kale have a was it grown in a poor soil? Was it doused with, you know, cancer causing chemicals, or was it grown in a living matrix where the the just like the, the ecosystem that we have in our gut will determine our health, right?

It can determine our health or our sickness. The ecosystem that is in the soil will determine the health of the plants. And if those plants, those that microbiome the soil will determine.

And we know that I've done I bring my daughter Rosie, which is in grade school. We've done studies on the soil here. And we've shown that live in soils that have that have a full complement of healthy, microbial ecosystems can produce 50% more of the cancer fighting phytonutrients than conventionally grown produce.

Wouldn't you want those extra phytonutrients, which I didn't, I don't think we talked about it before, but just so our audience understands, phyto nutrients are they're very top level.

They're called secondary plant metabolites. They're not like the photosynthesis, like the carbohydrate eats or the simple mass nutrients that plants make.

These are very refined and and very of, comparably rare, comparatively rare molecules that are in the plant. But they're extremely powerful. And what they do is they can they can block signals in our body, that are being sent to little cancer cells to grow and, and, this, yeah.

And, and and when you have more of them, they block more of the cancer cell growth, and they prevent the cancer cells from grabbing blood supply so that they can grow bigger and better.

Sure. They're antiangiogenic. So we're talking here about high quality, really high quality plant based nutrition and precision. Precision nutrition and precision.

The way we design the diet, where we get the food from and all these things play a role. And, you know, what do you feel about, you know, my feeling is that it can take time to build up the nutrient levels in the cells.

And we don't have time with these people with cancer. So we want to get the the body flooded with nutrients quicker. So therefore the use of, you know, sprouts and juices would be appropriate because we're going to get those nutrients in and maybe the appetite is not high and if needed, a lot of food.

So using both sprouting and juicing we can increase the speed of getting the cells nutrients actually up to snuff. You have to give them you have to give them a booster.

Yeah. And that's you know, we learned that from you, in our cancer protocols here. When people come to us, you know, we we load them up with all of the most, antiangiogenic foods, the ones that have been shown, at least in vitro, to have the phyto nutrients that block cancer cell growth.

But, we, usually also, and especially focus on this who people have had, people have who are already nutritionally behind the eight ball or who had difficulty eating upfront.

We, we, we give them these concentrated green juices so we can get a lot of these phytonutrients packed into a small, you know, a small dose, a small, a small space volume.

Yeah. You know, the the other thing I realized is that, you know, back in my Father's Day, you know, when I. And I'm sure when you were in medical school and I was in medical school, you graduated medical school.

Where? But you're on nine 8888. I graduated 88 as well. You did? Wow. They did you graduate the same year? Anyone? You know, when I was in medical school, they taught us that the colon was this tube.

There wasn't really much going on. It was a it was a trend. It was the transit of stool. And there was a lot there was flux of water and electrolytes, like a lot of potassium going back and forth water.

But that's about it. And there was bacteria down there, but we didn't really know a lot about it. Is that did you have a similar lesson about colon? Yeah.

Gut Microbiome, Diversity, and Nutrition Strategy

And today, you know, the colon is is is dominant is a dominant force, not the colon itself necessarily, but the ecosystem within the colon, Coleman, of the trillions of bacteria is its own immune organ and informs the rich layer of immune cells in our colon lining to fight for us, or in the bad situation to fight against us.

But but in the case of cancer, to fight for us and, we now know that there are there and of course, this is in the early days of this research, but we know that there are certain kinds of ecosystems, microbial ecosystems in the colon that you would like to have if you're a cancer patient, because you will have greater survival if you have this type of forest, this type of ecosystem of bacteria and microbes in your colon.

And guess what the type is that that is associated with greater survival. It's a private tella. It's a specific bacterial predominance type of system which is specifically associated with the eating of whole plant foods.

And we know now that people who have these ecosystems, who they've done research so far into colorectal cancers, that and into metastatic metastatic melanomas, that, that the people who have these, kinds of ecosystems that are driven by plant eating, a lot of plant fibers or plant based diets do have increased survival rates, for sure.

And, so, and, you know, that comes from I don't know if you want to say anything but that we know after years of study and we didn't know this in my Father's Day.

And this is why I'm thinking, you know, the chicken that was the chicken and the meat and the fish that my father was eating was replaced by all these plants that gave them all the buckwheat and the the beans and the legumes and the kale and and so that shifted his gut ecosystem to, as you said earlier, redirect his immune system to help kill off the cancer cells.

Meanwhile, all the phytonutrients in the these greens and these other foods were helping to reduce our, blood supply to the cancer tumors so that they could shrink.

And so, yeah, and we give like five types of green vegetables, five different types, I don't know, because to, to increase the efficacy in density, one, raw non cruciferous greens like lettuces, you know, baby greens baby.

You know green mixes. Number two raw cruciferous vegetables. Right. It's two types. Number three cook cruciferous vegetables like broccoli cooking. So you can get more of it in there.

And number four non cruciferous cooked like string beans and asparagus and artichokes. And number five an assortment of greens sprouts or microgreens.

Five different types of green vegetables to populate this green to populate the gut or what it needs. You know and and that is the reason why that's so beautiful is because, I was I was, you know, looking into the research before

our call, diversity, diversity of the ecosystem, not it's not just a private tela, this specific bacteria base or predominant ecosystem, but having a lot of different kinds of good organisms as well.

Each, and these this diversity is driven by a diverse complement of all the plants that you're eating. So as you are saying, right, if people think, oh my God, how can I eat as much kale as possible?

Was kale is king. That is so strong. But you also. Right, you want some cooked kale. You want raw kale. You want this kind of. Actually, you want things like Jerusalem artichokes that have a lot of inulin in the right.

You want all kinds of, you know, you want, whole grains that have very resistant starches in them, like, you know, the Kodo millets or the blacks or guns that that can really feed a beautiful complement of different bacteria in your gut.

So. Yeah. So and so what do you think? Do you think just like people, have this unrealistic expectation of what doctors can do and chemo can do and conventional and they underestimate what nutritional excellence can do.

Likewise, we're seeing a growth of integrative, functional and alternative medicine who don't really get people living healthily. They just look for give them other therapies and interventions like ozone and plasmapheresis, and they're just looking for more.

It's like almost like they're taking advantage of people with cancer who we're looking for hope. And they and the cancer patients still doesn't get the right answer.

And they often put them on meat based diets with all these extra therapies. And let me just say one more thing, and that they. That they're they don't even understand that the extra protein, the high protein from animal products can drive the cancer replication.

So they actually giving them. And do you look at the you try to even restrict protein by minimizing, let's say hemp seeds and soybeans. So in other words, are you trying to look for reduction in protein in your diet design reduction even in plant protein or just animal protein.

And and just and before we close up about this idea of these, the alternative medicine alternative cancer community of physicians giving people also a this an, you know, leading them down a wrong path, you know, well, I, I, we can have another half hour discussion just on this.

Let me just address, first of all, the the plant, you know, a potential concern about, having too much plant protein versus, you know, in, cancer patients diet.

Is, is that because that has the potential to increase insulin growth factor type one? You know, I, I think it's, it's a it's it's somewhat of a tightrope that you have to walk.

And I think what so our audience understands what you're alluding to is we know that animal heavy, animal content trade in protein diets absolutely drive up insulin growth factor type one.

And that that is a hormone that is made by our own bodies or liver and fat cells. And then that that is the signal or that tells cancer to grow. So you don't you don't want a lot of IGF one.

However, I know this is a topic you've discussed before. You do want some IGF one. I mean, and oftentimes in medicine, you know, there's not nothing if things are not completely black and white.

Sometimes there's some gray areas if you get too little IGF one, you can become very frail, right? And as you get older and feeble. So we since I opened the practice, we have been following IGF one in every single patient.

I can chart them out. I see the trajectory. And what I've noticed is when we have, first of all, we, obviously promote diets, high quality diets and whole plant foods, what you would call a neutral Italian diet.

IGF-1, Functional Medicine, and Avoiding Misinformation

And we have different, different sort of, kinds of these diets. An initial one is fairly low in whole plant proteins. And I've noticed that when oftentimes when the patients go on these, their IGF one levels will fall to love.

They actually go below or below the mean or below the reference range. And so however I would say for the average, the average sized person, if we get them on about 60g of whole plant protein, I notice they can definitely maintain low IGF one levels.

So you know, so not to be provocative of cancer cell growth but within the low normal range. And that's it. That's an area that I've settled on. And yet I think if they still get sumption there, they can still maintain their muscle mass and prevent sarcopenia and bone loss and stuff like, you see, you modulate it, you watch it, you modulate that, you know. Yes.

So regarding all of this other, you know, the different currents of thought and all these different kinds of doctors, I, I absolutely agree with you. This, functional medicine has become extremely popular now.

I think it it has replaced it or that brand or that, that, I don't know what you want to call it. That title has replaced the, the old title of alternative medicine that was big in the 90s.

Like with Andrew, while everyone is coming into my office and asked me if I'm a functional medicine doctor and I say, no, I'm not a functional medicine doctor, because, I, I see a similar thing from what functional medicine doctors seem to be to me is that they're they have no focus on nutrition.

As far as from a health, a health driven basis, it is not evidence based. Whatever. They, they, I've noticed that both. And I don't want to speak for every functional medicine doctor, but I've noticed that what the patients I've seen, there's not really a not a evidence based nutrition, guidance that they give to this patient.

And it's usually they're usually telling patients to eat, diversely. Maybe they tell patients to they may tell patients some of them to avoid processed carbohydrates.

Maybe. Yeah, but definitely not in general not to avoid animal foods. And that that's a great concern for me regarding cancer because, in, about five years ago, there was this, breakthrough research, maybe 6 or 7 years ago that showed that saturated fats in particular.

And these are the facts that predominate in animal foods, whether they be salmon or chicken or meat or cheese or, you know, pork, that they are a powerful driver of metastasis in know solid tumors.

And and they actually found the way the mechanism for the way it works that cancer cells have, the receptors for saturated fat. And when you eat a lot of saturated fat, the saturated fat binds on to these specific receptors are called CD 36 receptors.

And then message to the cancer cell to go metastasized and travel as far away as you can and establish outposts in the brain and the lungs and the liver.

So why would you want to be eating these foods if you were a cancer patient? This is another reason why I think my father had such a, a an unheard of Germany and and, reduction in his cancer cell mass.

Because he cut out all saturated fats from his diet, all animal foods. And, you know, so one of the reason I'm doing this, this summit is because there's so much cancer information out there, out of the alternative community, too.

And not only are they giving people wrong information, but they're also selling them on these unproven and this proven therapies, instead of doing the things that we know that that really could work.

And there's so much nonsensical, there's so much nonsense out there too. And I've often thought, well, so, I mean,

you you've spent your whole professional life doing this.

Yeah. If you had to look, just look at the testimonials you have of people who have survived, who have cancer. If I had cancer, wouldn't I want to go with the person who has the best track record?

Right? Who uses modalities that actually work instead of, you know, something that I there's no evidence. There's no evidence that or I'm not going to say none, but there's really not a track record of of these things ever having work.

And when I think about this, I think the reason why people I think are more attracted to the functional medicine or the the these are integrative approaches is because because they it's easy for them to do it's easier for them to take a bottle of pills or this, you know, be chelating or get I. V.

vitamins or do this, you know, whatever infrared sauna, I don't know what it is or get these tests than it is to actually sit down and avoid, addictive foods, you know, exercise, you know, eat all of these foods which are, which they may see is unpalatable at first.

It and that's, you know, within their wheelhouse to do. You're right. It's easy to fly to Mexico and get your arm hooked up to an IV machine and have this blood taken out of your body and filtered through a filter and put back in.

And and that's instead of changing your diet, it's easier to do that. It's exactly in the tens of thousands of dollars to do it. Yeah. Right. So all right, Ryan.

Well, this was really important and great to have you put it together. Thank you so much. And I thank you for your kind words about me in my introduction.

I don't deserve it. And I hope to someday rise to the occasion. So I do, and I it's always an honor and a pleasure. As you know, your, your a good friend of mine, and I, whenever you ask me, I, I come running with bells on because, you know, you've, you've always helped me, without any, you know, to to to, without any end in sight.

So it's up to you. They can't go over. Well, you can help we over the year. Thank you for everything you do and all the people you help, too. So thanks again, Ryan. Be in touch.

Thanks, Joe. Bye, everybody. See you next month. See you next time.