

Farber Center for Radiation Oncology Newsletter by Keely Garfield
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Plato said, “*The part can never be well unless the whole is well.*” The team of doctors, technicians and staff at The Farber Center for Radiation Oncology take this maxim pretty seriously and so not long ago they welcomed Donna Karan’s Urban Zen Integrative Therapy program (UZIT) into their midst, actualizing their faith in integrative medicine and the power of combined healthcare strategies towards optimal wellbeing. As the clinical coordinator for the UZIT program, I have witnessed the program’s astounding growth over these few short months. It continues to unfold and blossom in the perfectly tended soil of this medical oasis through the careful cultivation of everyone who has worked to give it life. This includes the UZIT volunteers and the patients themselves who have listened to their doctors’ urgings to try an UZIT session have put their trust and curiosity before any apprehension or skepticism. For this, they are rewarded with a truly integrated healing experience in an environment of collaborative care.

What is an UZIT session? Generally scheduled right after radiation treatment, it provides one-on-one time with an integrative therapist and usually lasts approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Sessions combine gentle yoga, restorative yoga, breath awareness, meditation, aromatherapy, reiki and contemplative care to address a variety of symptoms including pain, anxiety, nausea, insomnia, constipation and exhaustion. Initially, most patients seek relief from stress and fatigue, wanting to feel more relaxed, and also have more energy. What they discover is a way to help themselves during and after cancer treatments as they go back to their lives with new and simple tools they can use daily. The techniques they learn help them to breath easier, deal with tension, and alleviate pain and discomfort. They begin to realize the importance of self-care and are empowered to make positive changes in their lifestyles beyond recovery. Indeed, they discover, as one great teacher put it, “*The land of healing lies within, radiant with the happiness that is blindly sought in a thousand outer directions.*”

How does it work? Essentially, our nervous systems are working overtime and the body cannot tell the difference between “good” stress and “bad” stress. Reacting to this or that, the body ratchets up the load of sugars, fats, and hormones such as cortisol we need to take action. We never get a chance to truly rest and recover. Most of us don’t get enough sleep and even when we do, true relaxation can be illusive. Integrative therapy is an invitation to practice *active relaxation*, amplifying the body’s own ability to repair and renew. Another outcome is the sense of power to be found in regaining control over our lives as we begin to see ourselves as participants in our healing journeys, cure or no.

On a typical day at Farber I can be found working with patients perhaps leading a chair-yoga sequence to boost energy, offering reiki to restore balance, using essential oils such as grapefruit or peppermint to assuage nausea or dizziness, meticulously folding blankets to create a restorative pose that will ease back pain, teaching someone how to stand in tree pose to help focus the mind, guiding another through a body-scan meditation or practicing simply for the joy of it! Being with my patients and holding the space for whatever needs to arise or fall away is vital.

A decade ago, I lived near-by The Farber Center and was caught up in the terrible events of 9/11 that ultimately precipitated my own journey back to life. To be on this turf again, now sharing all of the potent therapeutics that have helped me and that I so passionately believe in, feels like a miracle. My patients share my gratitude and awe for this work, and together we acknowledge the The Farber Center for Radiation Oncology for its leadership, compassion, and vision in creating a home for Urban Zen Integrative Therapy.

Many Bows,
Keely