

**"The capacity for hope is the most significant fact of life. It provides human beings with a sense of destination and the energy to get started."
– Norman Cousins**

About Norman Cousins

American writer and editor Norman Cousins is best known for his book, *Anatomy of an Illness*, an account of how he used nutrition and positive visualizations, including laughter, to heal from an illness diagnosed as fatal. He was born in New Jersey in 1915. He served many years as editor-in-chief of the *Saturday Review*, a job he loved. Under his guidance, circulation increased from 20,000 to 650,000. He received the UN Peace Medal for his world activism. He died in 1990.

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COLUMNS

When hope heals

How a positive sense of calm and control can help combat disease.

David Servan-Schreiber | March 2009 issue

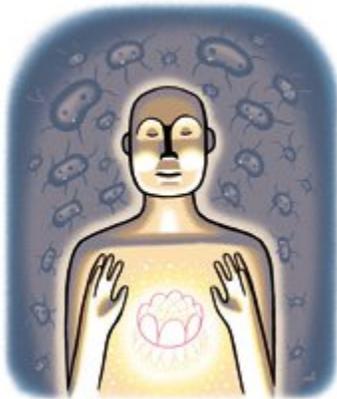


Illustration: Mark Kolle

Ten years after he was diagnosed HIV-positive, Paul was still alive. This was long before tri-therapy—the remarkably effective treatment that keeps AIDS patients alive—and everyone asked what he was doing to stave off the illness. He replied that he was taking natural supplements, watching his diet carefully and exercising regularly. One day at a press conference, a professor of medicine told him, "I'm sorry to say I've had a lot of patients who were doing the same thing and they all died. Unfortunately, I expect that within a year, or at most two, your disease will have gotten the upper hand."

Indeed, Paul died within two years, his hopes struck down by that terrible omen. It takes 24 hours for certain voodoo priests to bring about the death of a person on whom they've cast an "evil spell." The grand priests of modern medicine aren't so quick but can sometimes be as deadly.

An experiment: Two groups of rats receive transplants of malignant tumors and are given electric shocks. One of them can avoid the shocks by pushing on a lever; the other can't. In the group that

can avoid the shocks, the immune system does its job, counterattacks and eliminates the cancer cells in 64 percent of the animals. In the other group, animals soon get discouraged, the immune cells are paralyzed and the cancer spreads in a few weeks. Only 23 percent of the rats reject the tumor.

Is that why Paul died—because he suddenly felt powerless to escape the "shocks" he got from his disease? Cancer seems to develop faster and more aggressively in patients who have less control over the inevitable stress of existence, which seems to be one of the reasons support groups prolong survival. Now what could be more stressful than being told there's no hope of a cure? At the University of California, Los Angeles, Assistant Professor Steve Cole demonstrated that among AIDS patients on tri-therapy, the treatment benefits those who remain calm facing life's difficulties far more than those who have trouble controlling their stress. In the latter group, the virus spreads four times as fast.

But who will explain that to patients? Almost every week I hear patients tell me how they've received "death sentences" from their oncologists. These pronouncements are made with the greatest confidence, as if statistics were certainties. Studies like Cole's are almost never mentioned. Yet patients really need them. Because I've already made this mistake myself, I suspect doctors are more afraid of giving false hope than of talking about the worst that can happen. To guard against this Western-style voodoo, patients often need to know more than their doctors about what they can do to help themselves—beginning by placing more hope in their bodies than medicine is prepared to give them.

David Servan-Schreiber is a French psychiatry professor and the author of *Healing without Freud or Prozac: Natural Approaches to Curing Stress, Anxiety and Depression without Drugs and without Psychoanalysis* and *Anticancer: A New Way of Life* .

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes."

– Marcel Proust

About Marcel Proust

French writer Marcel Proust is renowned for his book *In Search of Lost Time* (formerly translated as *Remembrance of Things Past*), an autobiographical novel that Somerset Maugham called the greatest fiction to date. He was born near Paris in 1871. He had a severe asthma attack at age nine that nearly killed him; he remained in poor health much of his life. His bedroom was lined with cork for soundproofing; he wrote his novel at night and slept during the day. It took him 13 years to write the 3,200 page opus. He died in 1922.

Never Give Up:

Never give up; No matter what is going on Never give up. Develop the heart; Too much energy in your country Is spent developing the mind, Instead of the heart. Develop the heart. Be compassionate; Not just with your friends, But with everyone. Be compassionate. Work for peace; In your heart, And in the world. Work for peace. And I say again, Never give up. No matter what is going on around you, Never give up.

Dalai Lama