

**Book review: 'Dancing with cancer and how I learnt a few new steps' by Diana Brueton**

This is the author's account of the five years following her diagnosis of metastatic colon cancer. It's an account of treatment both mainstream and complementary, of times of raging against the hand she has been dealt, and of support and love from family and friends.

In her introduction the author acknowledges that readers may not want a book without a happy ending, but when she talks of striving to find meaning when life feels cruel and random, and marvels at some of the extraordinary things that have happened she captures the essence of what follows.

Brueton was a professional author, editor and art therapist and this is a well written and honest account of a 'rollercoaster ride of hope and despair', of coming to terms with an uncertain future, of wondering if each birthday or anniversary would be the last.

The burden of living with the uncertainty and the ever-present fear of death is vividly described, but the joys of simple things; a small gift, signs of spring in the garden, a visit to a favourite place; are also emphasised. There are many lessons here for us as health professionals; kindness and a willingness to listen to and value the ideas of the patient are of great importance, but so is the ability to witness and tolerate the rage, and times of desolation and despair.

However, for me, the most striking thing was the huge comfort Diana felt from the love and support of family and friends, not for what they did (though kindnesses were appreciated) but for being with her, and their willingness to share some of her pain and suffering.

I recommend this book to anyone who works with those with a serious and life-threatening illness. It helped me understand the concept of spirituality as someone describes their struggle to maintain their integrity at a time of huge changes. I am sure you will find something in it that will make you review what you do and say, as well as an appreciation of the important part good professional care can play in the support of patients and their families on this most testing of journeys.

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