

My alternative road to health

Roz Crowley hears about one man's unconventional way of tackling his 'untreatable' cancer

IT takes a lot of courage to take health care into your own hands, but a diagnosis of an inoperable and untreatable cancerous tumour can push you to find untold strengths.

Not that 62-year-old Michael Sheehan was ever weak. A successful life and pensions broker, married with three daughters and a son, he had a lot going for him.

At least up to February of last year. Already being treated for the blood condition haemochromatosis which led to cirrhosis of the liver, he felt particularly unwell on a trip to the US. On his return after numerous tests, a tumour was found in his liver and he was given a prognosis of no more than seven months to live.

"I was advised to put my affairs in order," says Michael. The diagnosis was a shock but it didn't drag him down. "I gave myself five minutes of weeping and regrets, but I never really said 'Why me?' instead 'Why not me' – this sort of thing happens all the time."

Having recovered from the shock, Yvonne, his second eldest daughter, like her father, set aside her emotions quickly and asked him how far he would be prepared to go in considering alternative treatments for his condition.

Working in New York, she was somewhat removed from the family's day-to-day worries and stresses, and believes it helped her to calmly research various cancer treatments. "Dad said that he promised my mother he would be around for another 20 years and asked me to help with the research," she says. (Yvonne's log of her journey with her father is at www.conqueringcancer.naturally.com.)

Working in communications management and being resourceful and results-orientated, she armed herself



POSITIVE ACTION: Treatment has given Michael Sheehan more energy for workouts and walking.

Picture: Denis Scannell

with spreadsheets and began to cross reference a wide range of alternative and conventional cancer treatments on the web.

They looked at the Gerson, Budwig and Bill Henderson regimes involving various diets, but the final choice was the Herzog clinic in Germany offering a range of treatments by an oncologist, including chemotherapy.

After a series of tests there, Michael was advised to continue with the chemotherapy tablets he was prescribed in Dublin to contain the tumour. He was also offered a controversial treatment known as hyperthermia to enhance the efficacy of the chemotherapy. With this, the body temperature is raised to prompt the multiplication of

white corpuscles, just as the body does naturally with infections, building up antibodies to fight them. The patient is sedated while the treatment is working and the head is kept cool with ice.

Michael also had lymph drainage massage and magnetic field therapy and was impressed with the range of ultrasounds and tests done on him for food intolerances.

The whole body is treated at the clinic to build up immunity and fight infection. Michael is on a diet which is mainly vegetarian and includes fish and well-sourced, top quality vitamin-rich fresh fruit and vegetables. Fibrous cereal products are part of his daily diet along with carrot and beetroot juices, his daily after-

work drink to strengthen the system and detoxify.

He is allowed only occasional sweet treats as sugar is believed to feed cancer. He also takes a number of high-concentration vitamin and mineral pills and his GP administers weekly vitamin shots, which he recently learned to administer himself.

He takes Essiac herbal tea and sticks to an exercise regime which was prescribed at the clinic to keep the body active, stimulating his system to produce endorphins.

These days he has the energy to do gym workouts a few times a week, and he walks four or five days a week. He feels more energetic, is putting on the weight he lost, and friends say he looks much better.

He can feel more energy returning to his body every day

"Even now when we describe what we are doing, we still would not give anyone blanket hope for any condition or veer them away from conventional treatment," says Yvonne. "All we know is that at least we have bought time, and my father is looking and feeling much better."

He is still on chemotherapy tablets twice a week and his GP takes weekly blood tests which are sent to the clinic in Germany for analysis. If the balance is wrong, something is done about it.

So with all of this is Michael ever going to be cancer-free? "That's what I asked when I went to the Herzog clinic", he says. "I was told I could live a long life with the 7cm tumour which has shrunk."

Michael also set about seeing if there were inner psychological traps that might have turned his body against him. Was he holding in some deep-seated tension, were there unresolved problems which were undermining his physical condition?

He went to a psychiatrist and learned about himself. He discovered that, despite enjoying work, he tended to stress about it. He has since put measures in place so that new partners share in the running of the business, while increasing his source of income. Sorting out his private affairs has reduced stress too.

"What's keeping me sane is an acceptance of my condition, and I'm not afraid of what's ahead."

Three weeks at the Herzog clinic cost €13,000 for a range of treatments and accommodation. Other sessions have cost less, around €10,000 and ideally he will go four times a year.

His insurance company refused cover on the basis that it is 'alternative'.

Society says no evidence to back up therapies

The Irish Cancer Society offers a detailed ebook on alternative therapies, it's titled Cancer and Complimentary Therapies.

When asked about alternative approaches a spokesperson said: "Generally, alternative therapies are used as a substitute to conventional therapies. Such alternative therapies include diet and megavitamin therapy, and immuno-augmentative (immune boosting) therapy. Most medical

healthcare professionals believe there is no evidence that such treatments can cure or reduce cancers.

"One of the main reasons why medical healthcare professionals have been reluctant to accept alternative therapies is that most of the treatments have



never been scientifically studied or validated. Because of this, they also believe that, in some cases, these therapies may even prove to be harmful.

"We base all our positions on quality, peer-reviewed research."

■ <http://www.cancer.ie/cancer-info/complementary>.

The better sex workout

Turn a good night into a great night with a little help from these eight easy moves

Beginner: 60 seconds, or 10 reps each move.
Intermediate: 90 seconds, or 20 reps each move.
Advanced: 2 minutes, 30 reps each move.

Kit you'll need
Yoga mat,
towel,
pilates ring,
chair

The benefits of working-out extend far beyond honing a hot and healthy body. Yep, working the right muscles can give you a boost between the sheets, too. We're not talking about the ones you can see — your pelvic floor muscles are the key to revving up your sex life.

These tiny muscles are located from

your pubic bone, at the front of your body, to the base of your spine, at the back, and hold your bladder and urethra in place. They're also responsible for those tingling sensations created during sex, and the more you train them, the better they work. That adds up to a bigger and better grand finale for you — it's as simple as that. ■■

The flexibility booster

What it does:

Builds strength in your lower back, easing stiffness so you can fully engage

Technique:

- Sit on a chair with your back straight and your feet on the floor.
- Contract your pelvic floor muscles and breathe out as you slightly tilt your pelvis backward (tuck your tail bone under).
- Pause for a second as you breathe in, still holding the contraction in your pelvic floor.
- Return to the start position as you breathe out, then relax your pelvic floor muscles.



The orgasm intensifier

What it does:

Activates and strengthens your pelvic floor muscles.

Technique:

- Lie on your back, with your feet on the floor and knees bent. Relax, and place your fingertips one inch in and down from your hip bones.
- To activate your pelvic floor muscles, imagine you are trying to stop yourself from urinating. You will feel a slight tightening of the muscles against your fingers as you do this.
- Practise switching your muscles on and off. Breathe in as you relax, and out as you contract your pelvic floor.



TOP TIP
Put a towel under your head to correctly align your neck

The confidence lifter

What it does:

Works your inner thighs and deep abdominal muscles, and stabilises your pelvic floor, giving you the confidence to try anything.

Technique:

- Lie on your back, with your feet on the floor and a Pilates ring between your bent knees.
- Contract your pelvic floor muscles, and squeeze the ring as you breathe out.
- As you release the squeeze on the ring, breathe in. Alternate between slow and fast squeezes.



The booty toner

What it does:

Tightens your bottom, while stabilising your hips, pelvic floor and core.

Technique:

- Lie on your side with your knees bent and your arm extended below your head. Keep your hips, knees and feet stacked, with your top hip lengthened to create a gap between the floor and your waist. Keep your spine straight.
- Contract your pelvic floor and bottom and lift your top knee up without moving your hip. Breathe out as you lift, and in as you lower.
- Repeat on your other side.
- Keep your movements small, slow and controlled.

