

CASES

Body, Prison, Dreams

RICHARD M. COHEN

Breeze embraced me as I left shining morning. I ran down a path stretched forward, my arms as wings. I soared in perfect

fully above a flowered hill, strong, my vision flawless, and rever.

A farmer below as I gained altitude. The grace of elegant line, and I was accepted into clouds.

Wake in the predawn chill, I imperfect legs to a desk to detail of my glorious dream. Surface, palms stretched wide, I fly for my thick glasses so I read my own writing. Eyes that

limbs that function imper- my improbable flight a metaphor for my search for er and that elusive grace.

ed man lives upstairs at my sclerosis and colon cancer air toll on my body.

was not far behind. The battle inevitably spreads to the mind. self-esteem becomes the end-of the sick. Skirmishes are invading cancer cells and my-hat peel from motor and senso- another conflict rages in my

gger, my boundless self-confi- ssing, and I want them re-

was mine, once, and I traveled erting news for television. The , the focus sharp. Now I am

e sclerosis and cancer have ed the swagger.

e business, and the shot threat- darkness.

produce and are tough and in- pected to jump from airplanes chutes and hit the ground run- ound and foolish enough to do world is smaller now, as am I. is turned inward, and I do not ut what I see.

ature of a limited life, a man ee clearly or walk strongly and, rticipate in all too many of res.

r compete in the marketplace, tionship with my family has l.

ilit of self-esteem is a dangerous oss emotional minefields. Com- with who I am means redefining ighly personal and subjective

ny way is measured by the dis- en once realistic expectations ility.

march is reflected in the eyes of , the arms of my wife. I am not : Loved ones map my life be- ourney is together.

es are no clearer than feeling bet- yself tomorrow than I do today that level of comfort mirrored in natter the most. We make it up ong.

ren know what I can no longer do. ow a ball with Ben or Gabe, the ly rolled back on the ground, n be seen. My weak right arm less wild pitches that are forgiven ed in good humor.

never bother asking me to bat. rs at me is that I must appear to h their eyes. What matters to

Cancer and Childbirth: Mutually Exclusive No Longer

Maryl only 28, cancer perform because tive, pre much di rence. F personal

But M of pregn mones c cer. She baby if si chose to instead t a still-he

When of two pr treated f surgeons radiation ti worried r recurrent sustain a marriage

Today, childbear cancer, th ing as a ining treat ability to disease an mothers v dren.

In a con survivors greatest c tients two I have chl will they b son, an ep Minnesota project inv more than cer are bel the side eff 10 years."

While ac as well as reduced fe inary evid apy, in ger duce and t than previ

new ways are being devised to reduce the effects of cancer treatments on fertility and on pregnancies already in progress when a cancer is discovered.

In the first report on reproductive issues from the 25-center study, soon to be published in *The American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, the researchers found that while higher rates of miscarriage and lower birth weights were observed among the offspring of former patients, "there are a large number of live births, births of healthy children, a lack of congenital abnormalities and very low cancer rates," Dr. Robison said.

"The data are extremely reassuring," she added. "It's a very good news type of report." The researchers would not provide details of the findings before publication.

Dr. Giuseppe Del Priore, director of gynecology at the Cleveland Clinic, said the

PERFORMANCE

A Quick Power Nap's Benefits

A change is as good as a rest for a brain worn down by working too long on one task, according to a study released yesterday in the journal *Nature Neuroscience*.

A group of researchers tried to find out why too much practice could make performance slump.

Led by Dr. Sara C. Mednick, a Harvard psychologist, the researchers put 30 well-rested people through the same set of tasks — distinguishing between shapes that were displayed very briefly — four times in the course of day, starting at 9 a.m. and ending at 7 p.m.

They found that performance dropped by more than 50 percent in 10 subjects who stayed awake the whole time.

The 10 people who napped for an hour in the early afternoon were able to restore their performances.

The 10 people who napped brief-

ly rebounded a bit.

In an interview, Dr. Mednick said these findings were consistent with studies showing that the brain needs sleep to incorporate newly learned skills into the permanent memory.

But the researchers were still unable to tell whether the decline in performance reflected general fatigue or an overload of the specific neural network handling the task.

To find out, they repeated the experiment, without naps, with 24 subjects, and let half of them switch for the 7 p.m. trial to a different version of the same task that put the work on a different set of brain cells.

Performance for this group was as good at 7 p.m. as it had been in the morning, Dr. Mednick said.

becoming pregnant and raising legitimate fertility concerns."

Today, a doctor could tell Ms. Zea of Minnesota and other women like her that pregnancy is no longer ill-advised. Even women whose breast cancers are discovered during pregnancy should no longer be advised to terminate the pregnancy, because there are no data indicating a therapeutic benefit from such an abortion, the New York experts said.

The estrogen produced in pregnancy is weaker than estrogen produced in other women and is less likely to stimulate breast cancer growth, even if the woman's tumor is estrogen-sensitive.

Today, too, even cancers directly involving the reproductive organs — ovaries, uterus and cervix — can sometimes be treated in ways that permit future pregnancies and

Some treatments keep the reproductive parts out of harm's way.

man's sperm and result in birth defects have not been borne out by experience.

As Dr. Elyce H. Cardonick, a perinatologist at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, wrote in the March/April issue of *Coping* magazine, "The medical literature contains reports of children born of parents previously treated for cancer, including Hodgkin's disease, leukemia, melanoma and breast cancer, and no excess

medical diseases is re- to the general popula-

There is also no report of Iren's chromosomes, de- preconceptual cancer

hill, a pediatric geneti- the National Cancer In- he University of Oklaho- Center, has studied this ds of patients who were early in life and were es. He said in an inter- quete reassuring that if red, there will be no in- irth defects or genetic

ver, cancers that run in ability to these cancers ed to patients' children, itself is not now consid- ning genetic risk.

he would like to do more determine whether sub- human genome might emicals and radiation tments

of the genetic effects of its come largely from Mulvihill noted. "May- ected against environ- etic insults. Perhaps ries are different, less r tissues. We know that r, but maybe it's a rare study this at the DNA

ll much to learn about following cancer, even le now fails to reach a ge of cancer patients. cancer patients of child- adequate information of having children after g to the findings of a ed in 1999 by the Clevel- on. olescent boys with can- erva their fertility can or future insemination atment, only about a men do so, the survey

clinical psychologist at zona Medical Center in children with sperm scade earlier, before he underwent extensive fertility-destroying treatments for Hodgkin's disease. "The possibility of banking sperm before treatment," he said, "is still not being mentioned to many young cancer patients."

The reproductive issues for women with cancer are far more complex and less certain to succeed. It takes weeks to stimulate the development and release of mature eggs, and during that time, cancer treatments must be delayed. Then, the eggs must be fertilized and grown into early embryos before they can be frozen for future impregnation. For some cancers, like breast cancer, the potent hormonal stimulation needed to harvest eggs could further endanger a woman's health.

Although at some research centers, ovarian tissue is being frozen for future egg

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THE DOCTOR'S WORLD

Expanding Horizons, and Expectations, in Cancer Care

By LAWRENCE K. ALTMAN, M.D.

ORLANDO, Fla., May 21 — New findings that excite cancer researchers often ring hollow to cancer patients. The reason is that the two groups have different expectations.

For researchers, an exciting development may mean that a drug undergoing early trials delays the progress of an advanced cancer for an extra month or two in 30 percent of a small group of dying patients. For patients, an exciting development means that the new drug will provide extra years of life.

Two very different perspectives, each perfectly understandable.

So when the last of 3,000 reports was pre-



In recent years, the drug industry has come up with "smart bombs" that aim to destroy cancerous cells without harming normal ones. The drugs are designed to slow or jam growth signals in the cancerous cells. Occasionally, the industry has scored big hits like Herceptin for breast cancer and Gleevec for chronic myeloid leukemia and GIST, for a rare form of intestinal cancer.

The drug and biotechnology industries want to market new drugs and therapies as fast as possible to recoup the big development costs. The industry boasts of significant advances to encourage doctors to prescribe their drugs and to encourage investors. Companies and leading cancer centers pay squadrons of public relations workers to flock around reporters to offer interviews with major researchers. So gains that seem

University, the chairman of the society's communications committee, "you would think the disease is being cured when it is not by any means."

Then there is the potential for conflicts of interest. Many cancer investigators are allied with industry, and some become enthusiastic boosters of the drugs they are developing. Although researchers are asked to disclose such financial interests, it is easy to imagine that their objectivity may be compromised.

Editors of medical journals have belatedly learned that some authors have not followed standard practice in writing their papers, but instead signed off on papers written by public relations firms.

Many participants at these meetings are wined and dined at sumptuous buffets and receive gifts when they visit a company's