



Helping Hands

Clinic Offers Alternative Therapy for Low-Income Cancer Patients

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— It doesn't look like much from the outside of the Charlotte Maxwell Clinic in a poor neighborhood in Oakland, Calif. But inside, it is a small slice of heaven for the women who come here to be treated.

[The Charlotte Maxwell Clinic offers patients pain relief — free of charge. \(ABCNEWS.com\)](#)

"That sense of suffering just stops at the door," says Wei Chee Leung, one of some 200 patients at the clinic. "In here I feel so well taken care of, so well-received."

Another patient, Karen Holly, agrees. "It is almost magical," she says, "because the healing happens not only with the therapy, but it happens in the entire environment."

All the patients here have one thing in common: They are low-income women with cancer. "This disease," says patient Ari Lathuras, "can turn your life upside down in every possible way — financially, emotionally, spiritually and physically."

The clinic offers pain relief in the form of alternative therapies: acupuncture, a form of meditation known as visualization therapy, herbal medicines custom-mixed on site and massage. All services are provided free of charge by some 120 volunteers.

"It's just a really direct way to help people and to feel like you're making a difference," says massage therapist Eleanor Martineau.

Human Touch Has Powerful Impact

And certainly, the power of human touch does make a difference to these women, many of whom are living alone in poverty, sometimes in homeless shelters. The clinic's co-founder, Beverly Burns, says that can make the fight against cancer almost unbearable.

"Most of the time," says Burns, "you can't go into a shelter until the evening. So if you go to get an infusion of chemotherapy, you're on the sidewalk until the shelter opens at night."

But at the clinic, the women can find a welcome respite from that other world of radiation and chemo. "You get the doctor taking care of you on a medical basis," says Karen Holly, "but what you don't get is the loving hand that you get here."

That loving hand is offered at every turn, from the hug each patient receives upon arriving to the full body massage they could never possibly afford on their own. The clinic was named for Charlotte Maxwell, a social worker who died of ovarian cancer in 1988. She believed alternative therapies greatly enhanced her quality of life in her last years. And she wanted to make those therapies available to women who were less fortunate.

The clinic works with oncologists by monitoring patient care and sharing information about changes in treatments. There are social workers on staff to help obtain financial aid and housing. They are hopeful they can find a place for Juanita Kindler, who has stage-four ovarian cancer and, as of the end of this month, no place to live.

"I'm really scared about it," says Kindler, choking back tears. "I don't have a lot of money."

The clinic itself depends on charitable donations and grant money, and right now it receives only enough to operate three days a week. But no one here acts as though they are impoverished, neither the volunteers nor the patients. At least you'd never know by the big smiles and friendly hugs. ■



A CLINIC FOR LOW INCOME WOMEN LIVING WITH CANCER

The Charlotte Maxwell Complementary Clinic (CMCC) is a state licensed primary care health clinic that provides free complementary alternative medicine (CAM) treatments to low-income women with cancer. It is a special place where women undergoing the terrible rigors of cancer and its treatments will be touched with kindness, compassion and skill. But more than that, it has become a community that breaks the isolation of living with a life-threatening disease.

CMCC offers the following **free** complementary therapies and programs in order to offer relief from the side effects of cancer and its treatments, including pain, nausea, fatigue, and loss of appetite.

- ❖ **Acupuncture** is the insertion of very fine sterile needles into the body at very specific points to help the body restore its own natural balance.
- ❖ **Chinese Herbs** use a 5000 year-old combination of recipes of plants and minerals that nurture the body's own vital energies and increase immune function.
- ❖ **Western Herbs** are a holistic method of addressing emotional, spiritual and physical concerns through the use of herbal medicines.
- ❖ **Massage** is gentle bodywork that helps to relax and improve energy levels.
- ❖ **Therapeutic Imagery** uses conversation, relaxation techniques and guided imagery to help a woman feel more peaceful and grounded.
- ❖ **Homeopathy** is a natural pharmaceutical science that uses extremely small doses of substances to stimulate the immune system.
- ❖ **In-Home Comfort Care Program** provides in home CAM treatments and practical support to women with end stage cancer who are too sick to come to the clinic.
- ❖ **Post Treatment Program** extends our CAM treatments, emotional support, and educational workshops to women living with cancer who have finished their allopathic treatment and have no signs of recurrence.
- ❖ **Free Food Program:** through grants from local corporations and donations from local merchants, including Full Belly Farms, Food Not Bombs, and SemiFreddi's Bakery.
- ❖ **Social Work Services:** our Social Work Director is a cancer survivor who provides support, advocacy, crisis intervention, and resource referral. We also have a bi-lingual social worker for our monolingual Spanish-speaking clients and an oncology social worker.
- ❖ **Transportation to and from the Clinic:** whenever possible, our wonderful volunteers provide rides to and from the Clinic to clients who would otherwise have to take public transportation.