

AUTHOR'S INTERVIEW - Zoe Hellman talks of her Ultimate Nutrition Guide for Cancer Sufferers

How did you go about doing the research for the book?

Zoe Hellman: Well, I have been a Registered Dietitian for many years and almost all of the principles in the book are what I am immersed in every day - consulting with the people that I see, keeping up to date on the most up to date science and working with colleagues in the field. So when I sat down to write the book, much of it came naturally as this is what I do.

I did spend a lot of time making sure that I had gathered all the most up to date information and advice within each subject area of the book - to ensure that whoever reads it, can be sure that they will be well informed.

Once I had the first draft written, I then spend some time asking people to read it and tell me their thoughts and professional opinions - which included a range of health professionals who work in the area of cancer management. I was absolutely committed to produce a comprehensive guide to nutritional therapy and cancer.

The book did evolve over time, in response to people opinions and the whole editing process.

Have you had any feedback from cancer sufferers or the carers?

Zoe Hellman: I have talked to and shown the book to people who have recovered from cancer or who currently have cancer and to their family and friends as part of the book's development. I knew that I needed to write a book that was understandable and usable, otherwise it just wouldn't work. I want people to read the book and *really* understand why nutrition is so significant and vitally, how they can use nutritional therapy to their benefit.

I listened to them and added in a few extra pieces of information and re-wrote a few chapters so that they were easier to understand.

What was your role in the NHS?

Zoe Hellman: I qualified as a State Registered Dietitian in 2004 and worked in Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust throughout primary and secondary care and mental health services - So I have had quite interesting and varied roles. Throughout working in the NHS I have worked with many people suffering from cancer, spending over a year working within specialist oncology services where I met people shortly after they had been diagnosed and helped them throughout their treatments and recovery.

During my time in the NHS I also undertook various freelance projects in lecturing, training and writing, some of which was focusing on nutritional aspects of cancer, working regularly with a national breast cancer charity.

Why do you think this book was necessary to write?

Zoe Hellman: Around 80% of people diagnosed with cancer experience some degree of under nutrition. Diet and health are inextricably linked and the awareness of just how important nutrition is for those with cancer is growing. Nutritional therapy is now understood to be an essential part of cancer treatment, rather than simply as an adjunct or an afterthought.

I frequently meet people who simply are not aware of how cancer affects their nutritional status and the major impact that this can have on their treatment and recovery.

Unfortunately, I also frequently meet people diagnosed with cancer who have adopted 'alternative' nutritional advice from various unreliable sources. The advice from which is trusted, as it is presented in such a way that suggests the dietary principles are safe and well researched.

These 'alternative' diets are often strict, eliminating essential food groups, and hence nutrients from the diet. Unfortunately some of the people I have met have unknowingly severely compromised their nutritional status and as a consequence were unable to tolerate effective levels of cancer treatment or were unable to do simple everyday tasks due a lack of energy and strength.

This was my motivation and why I firmly believe that this book was necessary to write; people need a book that keeps it simple - no gimmicks - just reliable information and advice.

How long did it take you to write the book, with all the research that you obviously had to do?

Zoe Hellman: The time between me starting to actually put pen to paper, to publication was around 2 years. I wrote the book pretty quickly, within a few months actually, but the process of sharing it with health professionals in the field and people who would potentially be a reader took a little longer and then all I had to do was find a publisher who was as enthusiastic about the project as I was - and I was lucky enough to meet with Emerald Publishing after a

while and the rest is history.

Did you write this book with anyone in mind?

Zoe Hellman: In fact, the whole time I was writing the book I was thinking of all the people that I have worked with; the people who had followed an ‘alternative’ type diet because they were led to believe that it would help them or the people who didn’t realise just how crucial maintaining their nutritional status was to their cancer treatment and recover.

I wrote this book specifically for all those people who are looking for information and advice that could help them, from a source that they can trust.

What is a Registered Dietitian?

Zoe Hellman: Registered Dietitians (RDs) are the only qualified health professionals that assess, diagnose and treat diet and nutrition problems at an individual and wider public health level. Uniquely, dietitians use the most up to date public health and scientific research on food, health and disease, which they translate into practical guidance to enable people to make appropriate lifestyle and food choices.

Dietitians are the only nutrition professionals to be statutorily regulated, and governed by an ethical code, to ensure that they always work to the highest standard. The title dietitian can only be used by those appropriately trained professionals who have registered with the Health Professions Council and who practice in line with a strict ethical code.