



How an integrative oncologist can help navigate the overwhelm of
your child's diagnosis – Laura Lane's interview with Dr. Adam McLeod
– Full Transcript

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[Music – Sending a Line by Fiz Anthony]

Thank you for tuning into the Hope Strength Courage Podcast. Love and support for parents whose kids are fighting for their lives! A weekly podcast created to support parents and caregivers of children diagnosed with cancer where you will find resources collected to help you face each day with Hope, Strength and Courage. From interviews with the top experts in their fields: doctors, psychologists, chaplains and inspiring frontline workers in pediatric oncology as they share their best advice, as well as day-to-day advice collected from other cancer moms and leaders in personal growth and development. From individuals who understand how hard it can be, I hope you will feel better prepared to cope with the day-to-day challenges of caring for your child.

Hi, I am Laura Lane, and I am your host. My own daughter Celeste was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 12. In 2015, I wrote about our experiences in the book "Two Mothers One Prayer: Facing your child's cancer with Hope Strength and Courage". Since that time, I have dedicated thousands of hours to share with other parents and caregivers the resources, tools, tips, skills and strategies I learned that helped our family to stay happier, healthier and more hopeful. My goal is to share with you my interviews with experts to support you as you care for a child with cancer.

[Music ends]

Today's episode features my interview with Naturopathic Integrative Oncologist Dr. Adam McLeod. During my original interview with Dr. McLeod, the first 3 times I read the word "Integrative" I had the hardest time wrapping my brain and tongue around the word. I've got it now but boy was it a challenge. I wish I had heard this interview when my daughter Celeste was first diagnosed. Our family was divided about alternative therapies to complement the treatment the doctors provided, and we had well-meaning friends and family suggesting everything under the sun. I wish we had had someone like Dr. McLeod there to help us to navigate the minefield we had just entered. I hope you will appreciate learning more about integrative oncology and how it can help you and your family navigate the treatments and side-effects of those specific treatments.

I am pleased to formally introduce you to Dr. Adam McLeod.

Dr. McLeod is a licensed naturopathic doctor with a special focus in integrative oncology. He is a member of the oncology association of naturopathic physicians and the college of



naturopathic physicians of BC. Naturopathic medicine has a wide range of tools that are effective at treating cancer when used appropriately. His background in molecular biology has helped him to develop targeted supplementation, which addresses the unique characteristics of cancer. The integrative cancer care is not about taking a large number of expensive supplements, it is about taking the right supplements on conjunction with the appropriate targeted therapies. Dr. McLeod is dedicated to developing an effective treatment plan that is both evidence-based and addresses the unique health concerns of each patient. Dr. McLeod is the author of five bestselling books including his most recent publication “Integrative Cancer Care. The Power of Being Informed.” And he has presented about the power of intentions at conferences all around the world.

Laura Lane: Thank you for joining me Dr. McLeod, it’s great to have you.

Dr. Adam McLeod: Thanks for having me on the show.

Laura Lane: Thank you. So, what can you tell us about what led you into the field of naturopathic integrative, no I’ve said it wrong four times now.

Dr. Adam McLeod: Integrative.

Laura Lane: Integrative oncology, what led you to that field?

Dr. Adam McLeod: Well you know it’s been a really interesting journey. Initially my undergraduate degree was molecular biology and Bio-Chemistry, and I was very much intrigued with how life works. You know, what are the molecular mechanisms that are actually driving life to work? And how can we use that understanding to actually help patients in a clinical setting? And naturopathic medicine, I was really drawn to it just because I had some fascinating experiences in my own life when I was younger with energy healing. And you know with my ill mother who... she had significant improvements in her health, not from any conventional therapies but from simple natural therapies. So it was, that’s really what sparked my interest in these natural therapies. And one thing I find really interesting about these natural therapies is that a lot of people seem to have this impression that if it’s natural, then somehow there’s no evidence to it. But that couldn’t be further from the truth because when you look at the molecular pathways that are actually influenced by these various supplements, it’s very clear that we are influencing these pathways in a clinically significant way and that’s why patients feel better. You know, that’s really what my practice is all about; it’s that I take great effort to understand what molecular pathways are actually driving that cancer to grow, or what pathways are causing that patient to feel sick while they’re on chemotherapy or radiation, and how can we change that to help the patient feel better and to persevere through all those therapies.

Laura Lane: Wow, that’s really cool. So, give us some background on... can you describe just a little bit more on naturopathic medicine, how that evolved and how it’s seen today and integrative oncology?



Dr. Adam McLeod: Well, you know, naturopathic medicine is actually, it's a very rapidly changing field in the sense that, you know, it wasn't too long ago where naturopathic doctors were basically just working with botanicals and homeopathics and that's kind of what everyone thinks of when they hear naturopathic doctor. But in naturopathic medical school, we get a lot of the same training as a medical doctor. We do all the same cadaver, pharmacology, biochemistry, and in British Columbia for example and I believe in Ontario, this is the case as well too, that naturopathic doctors have the ability to write prescriptions or lab tests, to perform minor surgery. I mean, these are all things that happen on a daily basis in any naturopathic clinic. But the beauty about naturopathic medicine... this is what really drove me to naturopathic medicine, is that we have such a large toolbox to work from. I can use all these different, effective, natural therapies, if needed, I can write a prescription for an antibiotic or for metformin or whatever. I mean, we can write conventional prescriptions to work together with these natural therapies. It's not a black or white thing, it's not one thing or the other, it's all about how can we use all these things together in a synergistic way and you know, when it comes to integrative oncology, that's one thing that is also very important as well too, is that people get so focused on just the conventional therapies, on just the chemotherapy that they're on. And they get this impression from their oncologist sometimes that doing anything outside of that is a problem, and that's going to interfere with the conventional therapy. But there are a lot of natural therapies that can be used together in a very synergistic way. And I think there's a common misunderstanding that people have and honestly, I don't know where this comes from really, but any naturopathic doctor who works in integrative oncology, they're not discouraging patients from doing chemotherapy or radiation, it's about using these therapies together. Because there's so many great things that we can do to significantly support patients through these therapies. You're much better off starting these natural therapies from day one of diagnosis. You don't want to wait until you've done all these rounds of chemotherapy and radiation where your immune system has nothing left, and then decide to try to all these different things. That's not an effective plan. You want to start this from day one. And if I could pick one thing that naturopathic medicine is particularly good at in the field of integrative oncology, it's supporting the immune system. There are some incredible tools that we have that really significantly support the immune system through these therapies and they're safe to use with chemotherapy when they're used appropriately.

Laura Lane: Oh very good. That's such a great explanation. I think you're right that information is not out there. So, how can naturopathic medicine be used to help patients in in that setting? What more can you tell us?

Dr. Adam McLeod: Well, you know, when it comes to using naturopathic medicine in an integrative oncology setting, I think the most important thing is you have to work with someone who works with cancer on a regular basis. Cancer is a very complex disease, it depends on the drug that you're on, it depends on the type of cancer that you have, and I think this is also very important to recognize too is that not all cancers are the same.



Laura Lane: Right.

Dr. Adam McLeod: Right, and this is very important for the public to recognize is that you know people go to Dr. Google and they start looking things up and they start trying these different things that are not indicated for their type of cancer, or that are dangerous. But my job as a naturopathic physician is to help develop these safe plans that can work together. One thing that is also really interesting is that when you look at the standard of care in different places in the world, I find in Canada, we tend to really be behind the times a little bit. There is not a whole lot of collaboration that is encouraged. It really depends on your oncologist. I mean, I can tell you that some oncologists have a great relationship with me. There's others I'll send them e-mails but, you know, they don't reply. Which is kind of ridiculous. It's very unprofessional. And there's ... it's just really this non-collaborative environment in some places. But you go to major centers in the states, you have naturopathic doctors in hospitals working together with medical oncologists to develop plans and patients started doing better as a result. This is a service that people are demanding and the evidence is clear that these patients are doing better, and I think that a lot of the resistance from the conventional community really comes from just a lack of understanding of what naturopathic doctors actually do. And you know, the irony about it is that when you look at a lot of therapies that we recommend, a lot of them are in their own mainstream medical journals, right, like things like glutamine for example, help prevent neuropathy. I mean that's in the journal of the oncologist. It's hard to get more mainstream like that. But those are the kind of things naturopathic doctors would be suggesting and working with. And when you take the time to actually break down the evidence, the things that we are suggesting really are not that controversial at all. It's about using these things appropriately together and we have to create a collaborative environment. And I think that the more that patients demand this, the more the patients ask for there to be collaboration between their naturopathic physician and their oncologist the more that's going to happen. And you know, that's just, it's a slow process to change that but patients are doing better as a result of this collaboration.

Laura Lane: Oh, that's great. One of the things I took away from what you had just said is at the beginning you said it's important to have a naturopath who focuses on oncology, and integrative oncology, I learned to say that word now. So, it wouldn't be that I would turn to my local naturopath who focuses on woman and children and woman's health, that she would not be the person that I would turn to for in the case of cancer. You'd want to find someone such as yourself, whose specialty is integrative oncology with type of naturopathic field.

Dr. Adam McLeod: Yeah, you do want to work with someone who has experience working with cancer because it's a very complicated disease, you know, like there's a lot of interactions that even naturopathic doctors that don't work with oncology wouldn't necessarily be familiar with. I find what happens a lot of times is that, you know, naturopathic doctors who don't work with oncology will often refer patients to someone



who does, especially if it's a case that they aren't comfortable with. You simply cannot have a cookie cutter plan for all types of cancer or for all types of chemotherapy. There's so many things you have to consider. Not only that they look up at the person's vitality and develop a plan that's consistent with their goals. Like what are we actually trying to accomplish with this treatment plan?

Laura Lane: Right. Well, that's great. I think really useful information, thank you. Is it dangerous to self-prescribe natural therapies during conventional cancer treatments?

Dr. Adam McLeod: It's very dangerous and I can tell you that a good portion of my job is going through the supplements the patients prescribed on their own and eliminate things that are just completely contraindicated or dangerous with what they're doing. A classic example is that if you just do a basic search on the internet for, you know, what can I do to stimulate my immune system of chemotherapy? There's a lot of things that will pop up. There's a lot of different ways that we can stimulate the immune system during chemotherapy but then, not all cancers are the same. If this was breast cancer, I would say absolutely let's do those things to stimulate the immune system. Let's do those things to inhibit those effects of estrogen, but if this is something like leukemia or multimyoma, you do not want to stimulate the immune system. Now if you do that, it's contraindicated, and the reason for that is that those are cancerous cells that are derived from the immune system itself, so when you're taking things that are stimulating the immune system in that way, you're actually stimulating the cancer cells as well. So, that's just one simple example. I would say another example that I run in to all the time is that if someone has estrogen positive breast cancer, then they have to avoid things that are estrogenic, they have to avoid things that are going to actually stimulate the effects of estrogen. And there's a lot of herbs, there are a lot of supplements that do exactly that, they stimulate estrogen. Particularly I see this happen frequently where woman will be doing the anti-estrogen therapies, they'll be on something like tomoxabin or letrazalt to knock down estrogen, and then they'll have hot flashes as a result, you know because they're significantly impacting estrogen obviously. And they'll go see someone who doesn't really know a lot about cancer, and they end up giving them a botanical, you know, like chasetree or wild yam, something to balance out their hormones. And what those herbs are doing is they're stimulated the estrogen receptors; they're effectively working against those medications that they're taking right. And those are the kind of things you have to be aware of because there's a long list of things that are estrogenic and you don't want to be self-prescribing. And I think that's very important to know and I think that one thing that medical oncologists need to recognize as well too is that some oncologists go through such great effort to discourage patients from seeing a naturopathic doctor, so what patients do as a result is they end up doing their own research and they end up taking their own things. And then they don't tell anyone either and it ends up being this situation where they're secretly taking these things that are very counterproductive and the oncologist has no knowledge of that. When your reality is what happens when you work with a naturopathic doctor such as myself, I will put together a letter and say here's the things that we're doing and if you have any questions or



concerns contact me. And it creates an environment where everyone knows what the patient's doing and you have someone who actually knows what they're talking about with these natural supplements, not just telling someone just to avoid everything. We're looking at what can you actually use? What can actually work together with this in a way that's safe and effective? And you know it's just important that you have an environment where everyone's on the same page, you don't want to have this situation where people are secretly taking things. And I see that all the time unfortunately.

Laura Lane: Yeah, I can see that completely. That you need that openness. That doctors need to know what people are taking. They can't be afraid to tell their doctor because the doctor's told them "oh no there's nothing they can do", right. So, tell us now a little bit what's the difference between pediatric oncology and adult oncology, because you talked about breast cancer, but that's obviously not as, it's quite rare with children.

Dr. Adam McLeod: Yeah, no, you wouldn't, you don't really see that in pediatric. First of all, and you know, pediatrics is something that is very different from adult oncology. You know, the types of cancer that you see are very different. And then also I would say that the biggest challenge is that sometimes it's very difficult to communicate to, you know, these young kids about what's going on. And it's hard for them to communicate back to you about what they're experiencing. You know, particularly when you're dealing with infants that are not able to speak or communicate at all really. It's very difficult for us to understand if they're developing neuropathy for example or if they're in pain from a drug in a very specific way. If this was an adult, they would right away say like "I have this crazy neuropathy developing," and then they would alter the dose accordingly. If it's a child, they can't tell us that, so we don't really know. And so, you know, the one thing that I often do a lot with these younger patients is that we have to look at what drug they're on, and we have to say okay what are the most common side effects that we can anticipate they would likely have. And then we just have to develop a plan based off of that. And you know, it's... I wish there was a way that we could know exactly. Like okay, you have this happening so, let's go at this one particular side effect more aggressively. But it's tough and we kind of have to just roll with the punches a little bit and just kind of address the most common things that tend to happen. You know, it's also really important to communicate with the patient so they understand what's going on as well too. And I think that's really a big part of my job as a naturopathic doctor in pediatric cases, is talking with the patients and communicating to the patient's parents rather and making sure that they're informed and they understand what's going on. Cause I find that in a lot of cases, they don't ask the right questions, and they don't know what's going on and they don't know what to look out for. Yeah, and they have so many questions about diet and supplements and all these different things and they're just not really giving anything. And that's my job, is to help them navigate all that and you know, sometimes it's just a few simple changes that could make a big difference as far as how someone's doing.



Laura Lane: To me, that sounds like a huge help as a parent to have someone else there to help walk you through that process because you have so much information coming at you when the doctor describes the diagnosis and the treatment plan. You're still trying to process the fact that there's a diagnosis. You're not understanding the treatment. You're not understanding everything that's going to happen and to have someone else there to sort of breach that and say, "okay these are some of the symptoms, these are some things you're going to go through, and let's help to deal with that," because that becomes your biggest thing on a daily basis. So, what's my child going through? And trying to...

Dr. Adam McLeod: I see, that I see that all the time to where exactly like you said like you're so overwhelmed with the diagnosis. You're so overwhelmed with the things you're being told for the first time. Even if you went into that visit prepared, even if you went into that visit with a list of questions, I bet that you would forget to ask most of those questions because you'd be just so in a different mind space at that time. And when I talk with the patients, you know, shortly after that visit that they've had more time to process that and we have a chance to go through all of this and discuss it in a more balanced way where they're not just fearful of every treatment that's being thrown at them. We can talk about okay, well here's what you can expect and here's what you can do to work with it. I find that sometimes, you know obviously, patients have to be informed about what they're doing and the different side effects that they can expect, but when they're given a booklet with pages of side effects, like literally everything under the sun that could happen. It's scary and patients don't know what to expect. And you know I find what I end up having to do all the time with patients is I'll talk to them and say "hey, look yes, technically any of those things could happen, it's a long list of scary things but we're gonna work with it no matter what comes up, We're going to develop a plan to address each of those things that come up." And a lot of these things that they're listing are actually quite rare when you look at it. I mean, you know, there's a list of the common ones and those are the things we should obviously be focusing on. But sometimes patients get overwhelmed when they're given a list of thirty, forty things that they can expect from doing a drug. We have to focus on things that are more common and deal with it as it comes up.

Laura Lane: Yeah, well that sounds like you provide an incredible service there, Dr. McLeod. Do you have any other advice for parents whose children have cancer, that you feel that would be helpful for them as they go through this with their child?

Dr. Adam McLeod: I, the biggest piece of advice that I could give parents who have a child whose fighting cancer, is that you want to start this integrative care from day one. And just because you're told that, you know, they shouldn't go see a naturopathic doctor. That's something that I would not advise someone to listen to at all. You can find a naturopathic doctor who can form a collaborative relationship with your oncologist. You don't have to be doing these big crazy expensive plans. You just have to be doing a targeted therapy that's going to work synergistically with that and you want to start that on day one. You don't want to wait until your options are exhausted and then decide to start exploring these



different things. There's a lot of things you can do safely right from day one. I think that more people need to be aware of that. And if you take the time to look at how that standard of care changes in different parts of the world, you'll be amazed to see how even other places you'll have naturopathic doctors working with those medical oncologists right from day one and that's what we need to see happening here in Canada as well too.

Laura Lane: Right, well thank you, thank you so much. So, my last question to you is now what website can we send our audience to so they can learn more about you and your work?

Dr. Adam McLeod: The best website to find my information about my practice is Yaletown Naturopathic dot com so Y-A-L-E-T-O-W-N-N-A-T-U-R-O-P-A-T-H-I-C .com, it's a long name, but you can write it yeah.

Laura Lane: We'll make sure to put that link underneath the video, so as people watch it, they can click on that link for you then.

Dr. Adam McLeod: Okay perfect, thank you.

Laura Lane: So, thank you very much, Dr. McLeod. This has been a real pleasure.

Dr. Adam McLeod: Thank you Laura for having me on your show here.

I hope you enjoyed and appreciated what we just learned from Dr. McLeod as much as I did. As always, links to Dr. McLeod's books and his website can be found on my blog www.twomothersoneprayer.com.

Please join me next week for Part 1 of my interview with Marci Shimoff, #1 New York Times Bestselling Author of "Happy for No Reason", "Love for No Reason" and "Chicken Soup for the Women's Soul". Marci is also one of my mentors who helped me develop the title of my book, "Two Mothers One Prayer: Facing your child's cancer with Hope Strength and Courage" and mentored me through the writing and publishing process. In my interview with her, we discuss her book "Happy for No Reason" and things we can do as parents to remain positive during it all.

Before we end our show today, we have one last segment. Over the last few years, I have asked other cancer moms what advice they wish they had known when their child was first diagnosed. I have compiled that information and will be sharing their advice each week. You can download the top 101 pieces of advice that I put together as a mini E-book at www.twomothersoneprayer.com.

Today's advice comes from Lacey.

She said, "Get an organizer like a personal calendar just for medical so you can log each med, blood product, and chemo given. It was helpful to look back and see when and what was given to help keep track of everything and stay on top of meds."



Thank you, Lacey, for sharing that. It's such good advice. When collecting advice from Moms, I heard this advice a number of times. I had a plain old journal I wrote down daily and weekly blood counts in, then started using a spreadsheet which I shared with Laurie. But because of the feedback I received, this year, we are designing a medical logbook and journal specifically for pediatric oncology moms. If you would like to test out the prototype when it comes out, or if you have suggestions of what you'd love to see included in the journal, fill in the contact sheet on our website with your name and email and "Cancer Mom Journal" at www.twomothersoneprayer.com.

If you have advice you have learned along the way that you wish someone had told you weeks, months or years earlier, I invite you to fill out the contact form on our website www.twomothersoneprayer.com and I will be sharing your advice with our listeners on future shows.

[Music in background]

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule today to listen to the Hope Strength Courage Podcast. I look forward to sharing more experts and advice with you again next Wednesday. Please remember to take a minute to subscribe to the show. Thanks also needs to go out to our Hope Strength Courage Production Team which consists of Kyle Outridge Productions and music by Fiz Anthony. To learn more about myself, Laura Lane and to order my book please visit www.twomothersoneprayer.com.

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