



## Cancer conference brings hope to victims

Posted Sunday, June 26, 2005 - 8:39 pm

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When Terri Tate learned she had tongue cancer, she wondered if she'd ever speak again.

Twelve years later, she's not just speaking, she's bringing down the house.

"When I was diagnosed, I decided to focus on the bright side of cancer," she told cancer survivors and others gathered at Furman University Sunday. "I got a lot of time off from work. . . and there were some mellow moments on liquid morphine."

The audience roared at her irreverence.

Tate was among the speakers at the two-day "Cancer as a Turning Point" conference, designed to help people get the most they can out of life after a diagnosis of cancer.

"There's nothing like seeing somebody who was supposed to die and didn't to make people who think they're going to die feel a whole lot better," says Tate. "I had a 2 percent chance of survival. I wish I could have talked to somebody who was 12 years out from a 2 percent chance of survival back then."

More than 900 registered for the event, which attracted people from all over the country. William Thompson and his wife, Sylvia, a cancer survivor, drove nearly 1,500 miles from El Paso, Texas, to see what they could get from it.

"It's like a coaching clinic," he said. "You take ideas from other coaches and incorporate them into your team, which is what we're doing."

"The way people make the best of a bad situation is pretty inspiring," his wife added.

"It's been very uplifting," said Jan Byrd, a survivor who drove four hours from Tennessee. "And my husband has gotten as much out of it as I have."

Also among the speakers was clinical psychologist Lawrence LeShan, who encouraged listeners with his messages of the power of the mind and living life to the fullest.

Years ago, he said, while on rounds in a New York Hospital, he came upon a young gang member diagnosed with a fatal form of cancer. He'd lost most of his comrades and life had little meaning for him.

As they talked, LeShan discovered he was excited by the idea of becoming a firefighter even though treatments weren't promising and few people survived his cancer. But the more he talked, the stronger he got. He achieved his goal and lived beyond retirement, says LeShan, who credits his attitude with his ability to beat the odds.



Cancer survivor and comedian Scott Burton used humor, juggling and a mouth full of ping pong balls during the 'Cancer as a Turning Point' conference held Sunday at Furman's McAlister Auditorium.

"None of us is a statistic," said LeShan, encouraging people to ignore the numbers. "And statistics have nothing to do with any individual."

Helena Ess of Greer took the story to heart.

"I had a stem cell transplant for multiple myeloma in November 2003 and six months later I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Both are in remission," said the 57-year-old personal chef. "The mantra really becomes everyone is different."

Pedrick Lowery, marking her one-year anniversary as a cancer survivor, said LeShan motivated her to make a list of things she wants to do in the future.

"It makes you think about how to live the rest of your life," said the 50-year-old Greenville woman, "and that applies to all of us, not just cancer survivors."

And Warren Arseneaux, manager of the Poinsett Club in Greenville and esophageal cancer survivor, said he was moved to help others who've been recently diagnosed.

"When I first went into remission a year and a half ago, I had a strong urge to help other people and I've kind of deviated from that," he said. "This put me back in touch with that."

Other presenters included holistic physician Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, nutritionist Jeanne Wallace, and comedian and cancer survivor Scott Burton. Also featured were David M. Bailey, who quit corporate life to become a singer-songwriter after he was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and actress Annan Paterson, who performed her own play, *Deep Canyon*, about her experience with ovarian cancer 15 years ago.

Response to the first East Coast Healing Journeys conference was so positive, said Greenville oncologist Dr. Jeffrey Giguere, that organizers are already thinking about another conference in 2007.

The event's holistic message helps people discover how much their attitudes can influence survival and quality of life, says Tate.

"I believe there's a lot more to it and we're now beginning to see that with the studies on prayer and attitude and intangibles that you just can't measure. There's no way of knowing what role those factors are going to play in any individual's survival," she says. "I'm alive and chewing 12 years after cancer. I don't have to know why. I'm just grateful that I am."