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Prodromal Dreams of Breast Cancer and Clinical Correlation

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Introduction

Two of my close friends were warned of their own breast cancers in dreams that prompted them to go for breast imaging studies. They are both healthcare professionals with years of training in left-brain decision making processes. They also cultivate right-brain skills such as meditation and paying attention to synchronicities, but it seems that the really important information they needed only came through in the dream state when their left-brain filters were temporarily suspended. Another friend had similar dreams which were dismissed with tragic results. This approach to self-care is safe and free like breast self-examination, but relies on trusting your intuitive abilities rather than your palpation skills.

www.realitysandwich.com/dreams_warn_breast_cancer

Modern medicine emphasizes high tech diagnostic methods for breast diagnosis such as mammography, ultrasound and MRI, with little credence given to intuitive approaches to the acquisition of knowledge about disease. This paper will examine the possibility of making a scientific case for including dreams in an integrative approach to breast health.

Stories of three of my friends will be presented followed by a review of the historical background, modern research and additional secondhand case reports. Recommendations for further research will be presented, including discussion of the use of large dream databases to create a breast cancer dream registry.

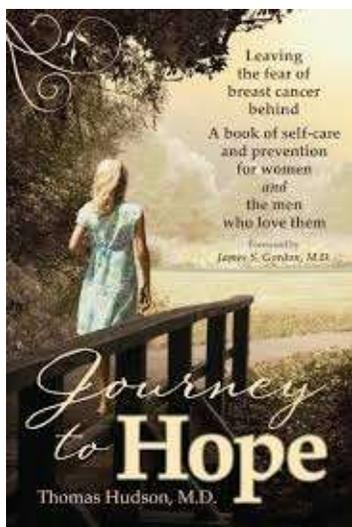
Conventional diagnostic methods



As an early pioneer of clinical MRI research, I am a big fan of the appropriate use of technology to solve diagnostic problems, such as MRI screening of women at high risk for breast cancer like Angelina Jolie. Although less sensitive, ultrasound can also be useful as an adjunct to mammography as mentioned in the “American College of Radiology Breast Cancer Screening Appropriateness Criteria” from 2012:

www.acr.org/~media/ACR/Documents/AppCriteria/Diagnostic/BreastCancerScreening.pdf.

Thermography is not included in this document, since the last scientific review in the radiology literature was in 1983, but it is becoming increasingly popular in the alternative medicine community.



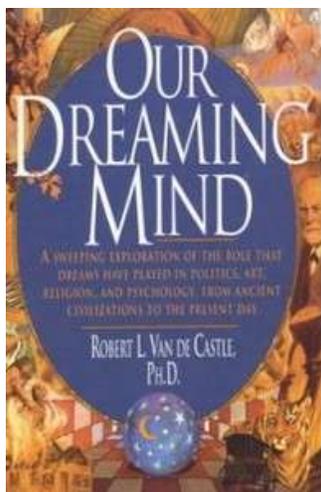
My friend and fellow holistic radiologist Tom Hudson has provided a timely overview of all these diagnostic modalities in *Journey to Hope: Leaving the Fear of Breast Cancer Behind*,, www.yourjourneytohope.com. His book also emphasizes self-care and prevention. He is the only radiologist I know who is certified in both mammography and thermography, plus he is also on the faculty of the Center for Mind-Body Medicine in Washington, D.C. (<http://cmbm.org>). Tom does not discuss dreams, but does cover various mind-body methods for reducing anxiety and increasing hope with regard to breast cancer.

Case reports of friends

I first heard of the dream breast warning phenomenon from a physiologist-turned-mediation teacher friend who had a series of vague dreams about cancer culminating in a precognitive dream of having surgery on her breast by a woman surgeon. This startling dream prompted her to go for a mammogram which was normal. Unsatisfied by this result she pressed the radiologist to do an ultrasound. The radiologist refused saying it was not standard practice to do ultrasound to search for a cancer that was not palpable or visible on mammography. She pleaded to have it done exactly where the dream indicated, and the radiologist was stunned to find it.

Another friend is a physician-turned-consciousness researcher who had two disturbing dreams in one night. The first scary dream was about a serial killer. The second one was about having breast cancer. Those were enough to send her for a mammogram which showed a cancer in the location from her dream. A third friend of mine reported that “I had a dream that I had cancer. I went to the G.P complaining of a lump and spasm-like feelings on my sternum. The G.P. concluded it was normal breast tissue, and the feeling in my sternum was dismissed, a devastating mistake. A year later, a different doctor diagnosed stage 3 breast cancer.”

<http://soniaslifeappeal.wordpress.com/myappeal/>



Previous breast cancer dream research

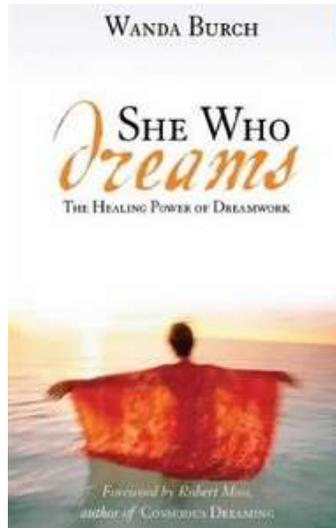
These three eye-opening stories of dream intuition inspired me to do a literature and Internet search for additional examples. Psychiatrists Vasily Kasatkin and Robin Royston have reported large series of dreams that warn of a variety of health concerns, including cancer. Kasatkin's research is described in Robert Van de Castle's book, *Our Dreaming Mind*.

<http://www.ourdreamingmind.net/TheBook.html>

Royston recounted the case of a woman named Nancy, who had a precognitive dream of receiving a stunning blow to the chest by a strange hooded figure. She punched the figure, who turned out to be herself, in the chest and shouted, "Bad Nancy," which turned out to be a play on words for Malig-Nancy when she was diagnosed with breast cancer 5 months later.

www.worlddreambank.org/B/BADNANCY.HTM

In searching for recent research, I got more than I bargained for when I hit the "mother lode" by finding Wanda Easter Burch's *She Who Dreams* (www.wandaburch.com). In her book she describes the dreams that guided her to find her cancer after doctors dismissed her nagging breast pain. Wanda also presented *Dreaming Well: Harvesting Dream Imagery for Healing* in the 2008 PsiberDreaming Conference (www.asdreams.org/psi2008/presenters.htm). She reported a survey of 19 women from a 2004 breast cancer support group meeting at the Charles Wood Cancer Center in Glens Falls, N.Y. Ten had experienced prodromal dreams of their breast cancers, with warning visits from deceased family members in all but one of them.



These warning dreams were similar to a message Wanda received from her own father:

“In 1990 - after running the gauntlet of mammograms that denied the breast cancer I was dreaming fully by late November 1989 – after the ultrasound in early 1990 that supplied only vague ‘wait and see’ confirmation – I hounded my physicians until I was sent to a surgeon, Dr. Lyle Barlyn. I told him my dead father had made a dream appearance – after many disturbing non-specific dreams – shouting that I had breast cancer and that I needed to do something about it *now*.”

Since her book came out in 2003, Wanda has received numerous reports of other women with prodromal dreams, not all of which included a visitation by a deceased relative. Sometimes the guidance is directly from a menacing dream figure, and appropriate interpretation is required. “Ellen, a young woman in her late 30s, was so in touch with her dream imagery that she knew immediately in her dream environment that she had breast cancer when a threatening intruder walked into her dream house and pointed a gun at her breast. Ellen’s cancer was discovered in its earliest stages, and needed a simple lumpectomy.”

Exact localization of tumors

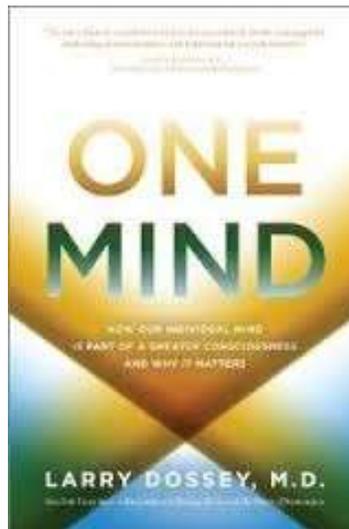
Wanda also described localizing the tumor for her doctor:

Dr. Barlyn asked, without flinching at the non-traditional source of my information, if I had dreamed the location of the tumor since it had not appeared on any of the medical

tests. I had. In a restless dream in between the terror of the possibilities implied in the “wait and see” ultrasound and my appointment with Dr. Barlyn, I had dreamed of a cone-shaped breast held in my hands. A stranger in the dream, unseen and to the side, asked that I turn the breast over. I saw a dark vial of liquid in a tube and I saw its location. I took the breast and washed the dark liquid down the drain.

Dr. Barlyn listened to my dream and handed me a felt tip marker. “Draw the location on your breast.” I drew a dot far underneath the right side of the left breast and told him that another dream had shown me a ledge, the dream debris – or tumor – hidden underneath the ledge. Dr. Barlyn inserted the biopsy needle in the area I designated and felt resistance, an indication of a problem. The surgical biopsy gave Dr. Barlyn the details of a fast-moving, extremely aggressive breast cancer whose cells were not massing in a fashion that allowed them to be seen on a mammogram.

My two friends also dreamed the exact location of their breast tumors.



Author/internist Larry Dossey reports another example in his forthcoming book, *One Mind*:

A woman had a dream that she had breast cancer. Worried sick, she visited her physician the next morning. She pointed with one finger to a specific spot in her upper left breast where she'd seen the cancer in the dream. 'It's right here,' she said. She could not feel a lump, however, and neither could her physician. A mammogram was done, which was

normal. When the physician reassured her that nothing was wrong and that they should take a wait-and-see approach with frequent exams, she was not satisfied.

This was the most vivid dream I've ever had," she protested. "I'm certain I have breast cancer at this exact spot." When she insisted on going further, the physician, against his better judgment, pressured a surgeon to do a biopsy. 'But where? There's nothing there,' the surgeon objected. 'Look, just biopsy where she points,' the physician said. In a few days the pathologist called the original doctor with the report. 'This is the most microscopic breast cancer I've seen,' he said. 'You could not have felt it. There would have been no signs or symptoms. How did you find it?' 'I didn't,' he replied. 'She did. In a dream.'

Deceased relative phenomenon

As I am a parapsychology researcher, the numerous occurrences of warning visits by deceased relatives reported by Wanda Burch got my attention. However, I had no idea to what extreme they would go to get the message across until she sent me this incredible case history about Helen:

The summer months brought Helen to her annual vacation spot in Florida where she began experiencing dreams of her dead grandmother. She ignored those dreams because they seemed to make as little sense to her as her other "peculiar" dreams. The dreams were insistent, some of them frightening; but Helen could not--or would not--understand them.

In the midst of her usually enjoyable vacation, Helen contracted a serious case of cellulitis on her face, a case that would have sent the ordinary person to the doctor. Not Helen--she returned home and insisted on being her own doctor, her face slowly recovering from the uncomfortable rash. Only a few days later Helen was walking down the stairs in her home, and--just for a second, just out of the corner of her eye--was absolutely certain she saw her dead grandmother on the stairs. In that flash of recognition her grandmother stuck her leg out straight across Helen's path, tripping her and causing her to fall down the stairs.

This time she was forced to go to the doctor--her face was bruised and swollen, and she feared her nose had been broken in the fall. There was one thing she could not tell the nurse when she was asked what had happened--her beloved *dead* granny had purposely tripped her

and caused her to fall down the stairs!! Helen went from the waiting room into the doctor's office. The doctor walked in, looked slightly puzzled and asked, 'Have you had a mammogram recently?' More puzzled than he, Helen queried why he would ask such a thing when she had brought him a bruised face and possibly broken nose to care for.

'Because,' he replied, 'an old woman, I believe somehow associated with you, showed up in my dream last night and said you needed a mammogram.' NOW Helen paid attention. Her dream diagnosis had appeared in another person's dream because she had ignored the messages in her own dreams. The mammogram showed her to be in an advanced stage of breast cancer, and subsequent surgery revealed six lymph nodes involved.

This story, the other 17 cases above, and two more recent ones are all quite amazing, but we have no idea about the sensitivity, specificity and accuracy of these warning dreams, since they have not been scientifically studied.

Collaborative dream research opportunities

I presented many of these cases in my *Dream Diagnosis of Cancer and Clinical Correlation* talk at the 2013 IASD conference, and the discussion afterwards centered on ways to create a database that would allow scientific study of prodromal dreams in breast cancer. Included in this dialogue was the management team from www.dreamscloud.com, who offered to collaborate in providing a cyber platform to facilitate collecting this important data. This project can be initially approached retrospectively in the short term, beginning with Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October (including outreach to breast cancer support groups), but ideally it would evolve into a long term prospective study.

For an initial retrospective study, a request could be posted on the Dreams Cloud website for women with confirmed diagnoses of breast cancer to post any prodromal dreams they previously recorded in a dream diary. According to a search of their site, there have only been two spontaneously reported dreams of breast cancer posted since February 2013, without any indication of radiological follow up or a confirmed diagnosis. Beginning to collect more comprehensive data in this fashion would provide some idea of how a prospective study might work, with the goal of establishing a substantial online breast cancer dream registry.

For a prospective study, women would be encouraged to post any dream related to the health of their breasts including any specific information as to which breast was involved and where, any direct indication of cancer, and whether any deceased relatives provided the communication. Then formal research permission would be obtained through an Institutional Review Board to allow for collection of follow up radiological and biopsy data for comparison to the dream information. The research would be conducted in collaboration with an academic breast imaging specialist with extended long term radiological and surgical follow up.

This approach would allow determination of the predictive value of a breast cancer dream, and also provide insight into false negative breast imaging studies and false positive dreams that are metaphorical rather than anatomical. Another prospective study that could be valuable would be to assess the accuracy of dreams in predicting the outcome of biopsies in women for whom mammograms indicated the possibility of cancer. It will be interesting to see what role prodromal dreams will come to play in the holistic integrative medicine of the future, but the possibilities based on the numerous anecdotal reports to date seem quite intriguing and promising.