

Recovery, Renewal, and Transformation: Introduction to acupuncture for cancer survivors

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White Pine Circle February 24, 2025

Objectives of this presentation

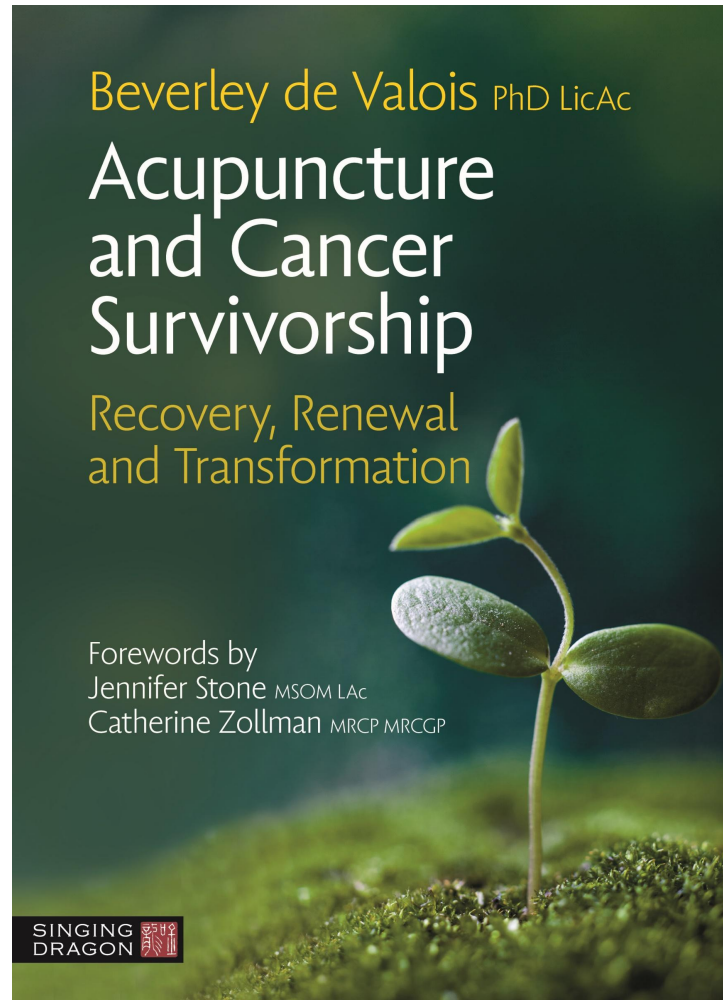


This is an introduction to four aspects of cancer survivorship and using acupuncture in cancer care.

Aiming to raise awareness, at the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

- Describe the Cancer Survivorship Pathway
- Discuss why all East Asian Medicine practitioners should be aware of cancer survivorship and the related issues.
- Discuss a model of using acupuncture for improving long-term health and wellbeing and developing resilience.
- Identify where to find recommendations for the safe practice of acupuncture in cancer care.
- Describe why acupuncturists should know about cancer-treatment related lymphedema.

Questions will be taken at the end of the presentation.

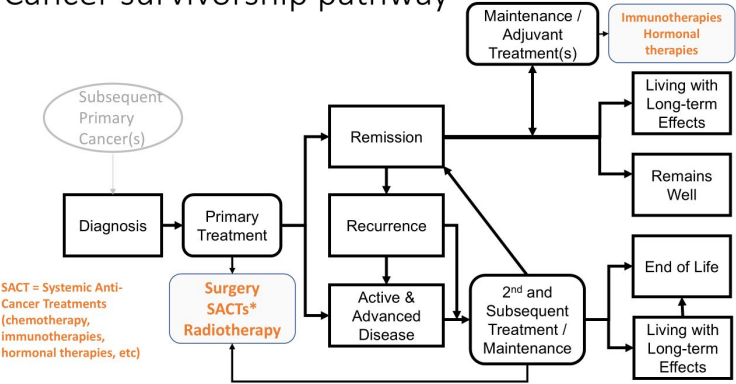


<https://uk.singingdragon.com/products/acupuncture-and-cancer-survivorship>

1996-2003	Aromatherapist, Macmillan Oncology & Palliative Care Team, North Middlesex University Hospital Trust
1999-2023	College of Integrated Chinese Medicine (CICM) LicAc Private clinic in Uxbridge, Greater London
1999 -	Research Acupuncturist / Researcher in Integrative Medicine Supportive Oncology Research Team (SORT) East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust incorporating Mount Vernon Cancer Centre, Northwood, Middlesex
2003 - 7	Senior Lecturer, Centre for Complementary Healthcare & Integrated Medicine, Thames Valley University
2007	Awarded PhD by Thames Valley University: Acupuncture in the management of breast cancer treatment related hot flushes
2008 -10	Research Grant, NIHR RISC: Assessing the feasibility of using acupuncture and moxibustion to improve quality of life for cancer survivors with upper body lymphoedema
2014 -18	Research Grant, British Acupuncture Council: Using moxa to reduce the side effects of chemotherapy
2015 -19	Clinic for colorectal cancer survivors, Barnet Hospital, London
2017-20	Past Chair, British Lymphology Society (BLS) Scientific Committee
2023	Publication of book <i>Acupuncture and Cancer Survivorship: Recovery, Renewal and Transformation</i>
2022-2024	Collaboration “Acupuncture in cancer care: recommendations for safe practice (peer-reviewed expert opinion)” https://rdcu.be/dHcDv
2023/4	First Acupuncture for Cancer Survivors clinics open in Wimpole Street London and Uxbridge Middlesex

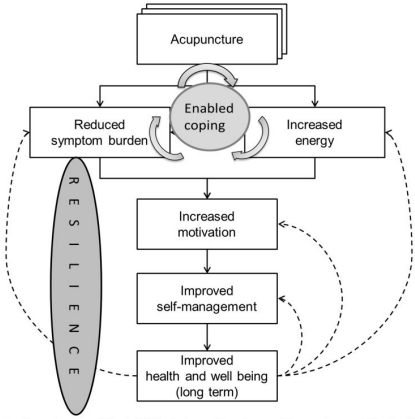
30 years' experience in 4 illustrations

Cancer survivorship pathway



Adapted from de Valois B, Young T, Zollman C et al. Acupuncture in cancer care: recommendations for safe practice (peer-reviewed expert opinion). Supportive Care in Cancer (2024) 32:229 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00520-024-08386-6>

A model of acupuncture for improving long-term health and wellbeing and developing resilience



de Valois B, Asprey A, Young T. "The Monkey on Your Shoulder": A Qualitative Study of Lymphoedema Patients' Attitudes to and Experiences of Acupuncture and Moxibustion. Evid Based Complement Alternat Med. 2016;2016:4298420. doi: 10.1155/2016/4298420.
de Valois B (2023) Acupuncture and Cancer Survivorship: Recovery, Renewal, and Transformation. London: Singing Dragon

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Acupuncture in cancer care: recommendations for safe practice (peer-reviewed expert opinion)

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Abstract

Sections Figures References

Abstract

ISL Stages of Lymphoedema

ISL Stage	Characteristics
Stage 1	Subclinical Swelling not evident, although lymph transport is impaired. This stage may exist for months or years before swelling is evident.
Stage 2	Early onset Accumulation of tissue fluid that subsides with limb elevation. Oedema may be pitting (firm pressure for 10 seconds of a finger or thumb on the area leaves an indentation when pressure ceases. Depth of indentation reflects severity.)
Stage 3	Limb elevation alone rarely reduces swelling. Pitting is manifest. Tissue fibrosis is more evident. Pitting may or may not be present.
Stage 4	Tissue is hard (fibrotic) Pitting is absent Skin changes develop, including thickening, hyperpigmentation, increased skin folds, fat deposits, papillomatosis, or warty overgrowths.

Lymphedema: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lymphedema>

Cancer Survivorship

A thick, hand-drawn style orange line that underlines the text "Cancer Survivorship". It starts under the 'C' and ends under the 'p', following the width of the text.

Why should TEAM practitioners know?

- 1 in 2 people will have a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime.

50%



- 19.2 million cancer survivors living 5+ years (70%)
- 48% have lived 10+ years since diagnosis
- 19% have live 20+ years since diagnosis
- Many survivors experience late and long-term effects of cancer and its treatments.
- Even if you do not “specialise” in treating people with cancer, you are highly likely to be seeing cancer survivors in your clinics.

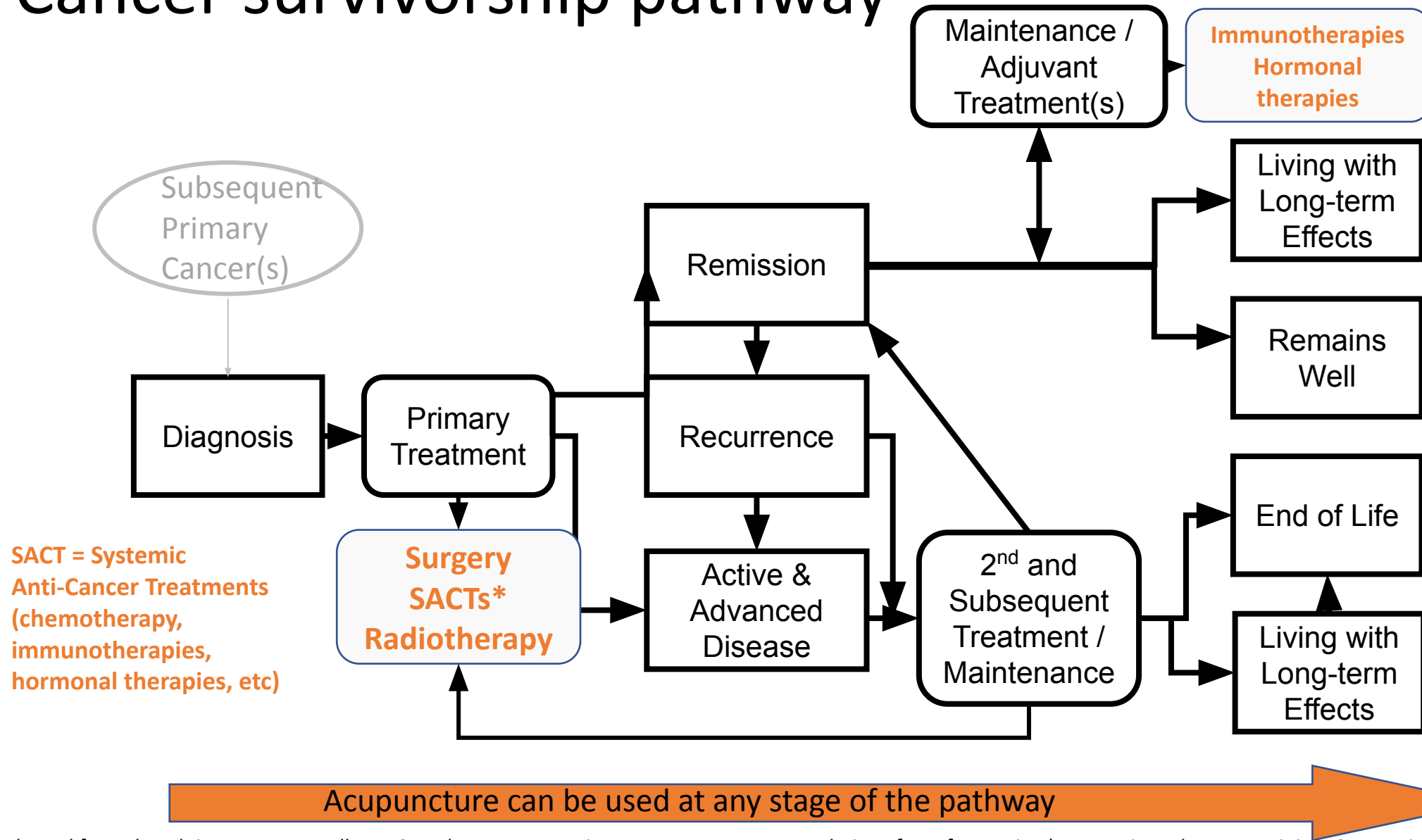
Cancer survivorship: more info

- People surviving longer after cancer diagnosis:
 - “survivors”, “people living with and beyond cancer”
 - Cancer seen as a chronic condition.
- Half of people diagnosed with cancer will survive their disease for at least 10 years:
 - Breast, colorectal, testicular cancers, Hodgkin’s lymphoma, childhood leukaemia
- Globally, number of cancer survivors (diagnosed within the previous 5-years) is predicted to rise to 50.5 million by 2040.²

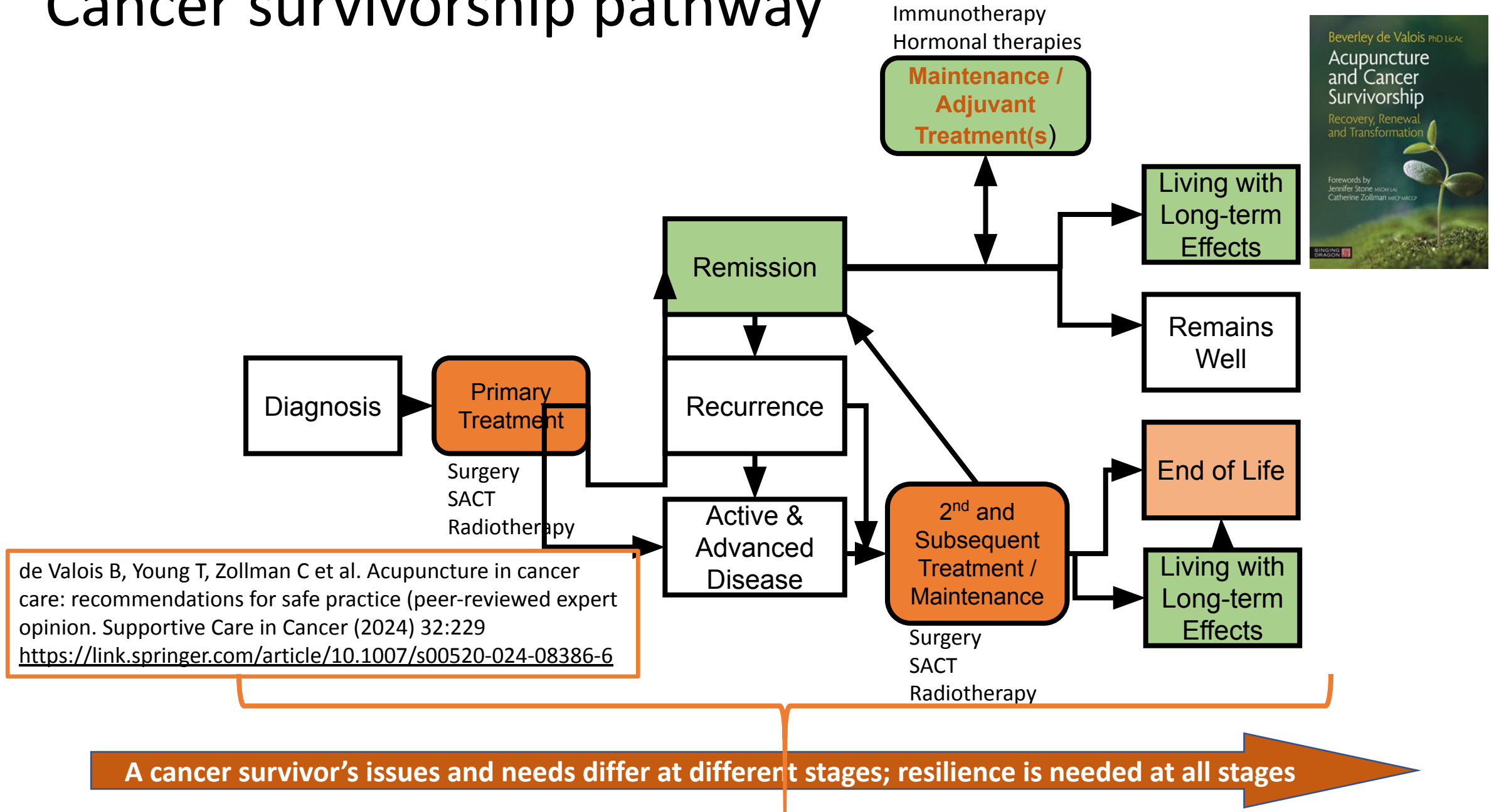
¹Macmillan Cancer Support (2012) People living with cancer (general survivorship): https://www.macmillan.org.uk/_images/people-living-with-cancer_tcm9-283689.pdf

²Carlson LE, Ismaila N, Addington EL, et al (2023) Integrative oncology care of symptoms of anxiety and depression in adults with cancer: Society for Integrative Oncology-ASCO guideline. Journal of Clinical Oncology <https://ascopubs.org/doi/pdf/10.1200/JCO.23.00857?role=tab>

Cancer survivorship pathway



Cancer survivorship pathway





Important terminology

- Survivorship
- Survival



What is “Cancer Survivorship”?

- In cancer, “survivorship” focuses on the health and well-being of a person with cancer from the time of diagnosis until the end of life.
- Includes the:
 - physical, mental, emotional, social, and financial effects of cancer that begin at diagnosis and continue through treatment and beyond
 - issues related to follow-up care (including regular health and wellness checkups), late effects of treatment, cancer recurrence, second cancers, and quality of life.
- Family members, friends, and caregivers are also considered part of the survivorship experience.
- (NOTE: There are more focused definitions of cancer survivorship).

National Cancer Institute (USA): <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/survivorship>

Cancer survivorship and cancer survival

- “**Survivorship**” should not be confused with “**survival**”. Survival is:
 - “The percentage of people in a study or treatment group who are still alive for a certain period of time after they were diagnosed with or started treatment for a disease, such as cancer. The overall survival rate is often stated as a **five-year survival rate**, which is the percentage of people in a study or treatment group who are alive five years after their diagnosis or the start of treatment. Also called survival rate.”
(National Cancer Institute: <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/overall-survival-rate>)
- We could say:
 - **Survival relates to length of life**
 - **Survivorship relates to quality of life**
- Practitioners of acupuncture are:
 - Concerned with improving quality of life (survivorship)
 - Not seeking to treat/cure cancer (survival).

Survivorship is complex

- Side effects of treatment
- Consequences of treatment
- Symptom clusters
- Pre-existing comorbidities
- New comorbidities
- Aging
- Societal pressures
- Fear of recurrence
- New primary cancers



Some physical consequences

Bowel or bladder problems (changes in function, bleeding, adhesions, strictures, fistulae,)	Breathing difficulties	Cardiovascular disease	Eating difficulties	Endocrine dysfunction	Facial or body disfigurement (scarring, hair loss)
Fatigue	Gynaecomastia (breast swelling in men)	Hearing loss	Hernia	Hot flushes (women and men)	Loss of fertility
Lymphedema	Menopausal symptoms (eg, early menopause, other menopausal symptoms)	Nausea, vomiting	Nervous system changes (eg peripheral neuropathy)	Oral and dental problems	Osteoporosis
Pain, arthralgia, numbness	Pelvic necrosis	Sexual difficulties	Sleep disturbance	Speaking difficulties	Stoma
Weight loss, weight gain					

Psychosocial consequences

Anxiety

Body image
issues

Change of
outlook on life

Depression

Embarrassment
or difficulty
coping

Fear of
recurrence

Fear of dying

Financial
problems
(financial
toxicity)

Finding meaning
after cancer
treatment

Impact on
family/friends

Inability to work
or continue
education

Isolation

Lack of
confidence

Memory/
concentration
problems

Stress

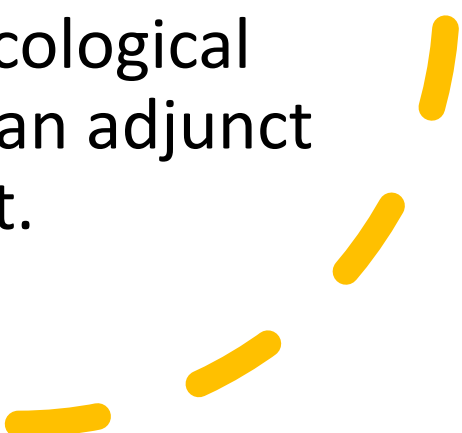
What will happen to any individual?

- Depend on many factors:
 - Type of cancer
 - Stage of cancer at diagnosis
 - Cancer treatments received – the more different modalities of cancer treatment, the greater the possibility of troublesome consequences
- Age
- Pre-existing comorbidities
- When treatment(s) administered (decade, improvement over time)
- Socio-economic factors, including access to healthcare provision, economic status, ethnicity, etc
- **Resilience of the individual**



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Key messages about cancer survivorship

- The cancer experience does not end when active treatment ends – it may continue for a person's life, even when it is in remission.
 - Acupuncture can be used at any stage of the survivorship pathway.
 - Cancer survivors' issues and needs differ at different stages of the pathway.
 - Acupuncture is a safe, effective, evidence-informed, non-pharmacological intervention that can be used as an adjunct to conventional cancer treatment.
- 
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Resilience



Resilience

- “process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. It is the ability to **“bounce back”** from difficult circumstances and may involve profound personal growth.” (APA)
- Enabled through many factors:
 - Personal control, positive emotions, optimism, social support.
- Can be developed by learning or developing coping behaviours.
- Varies throughout life.

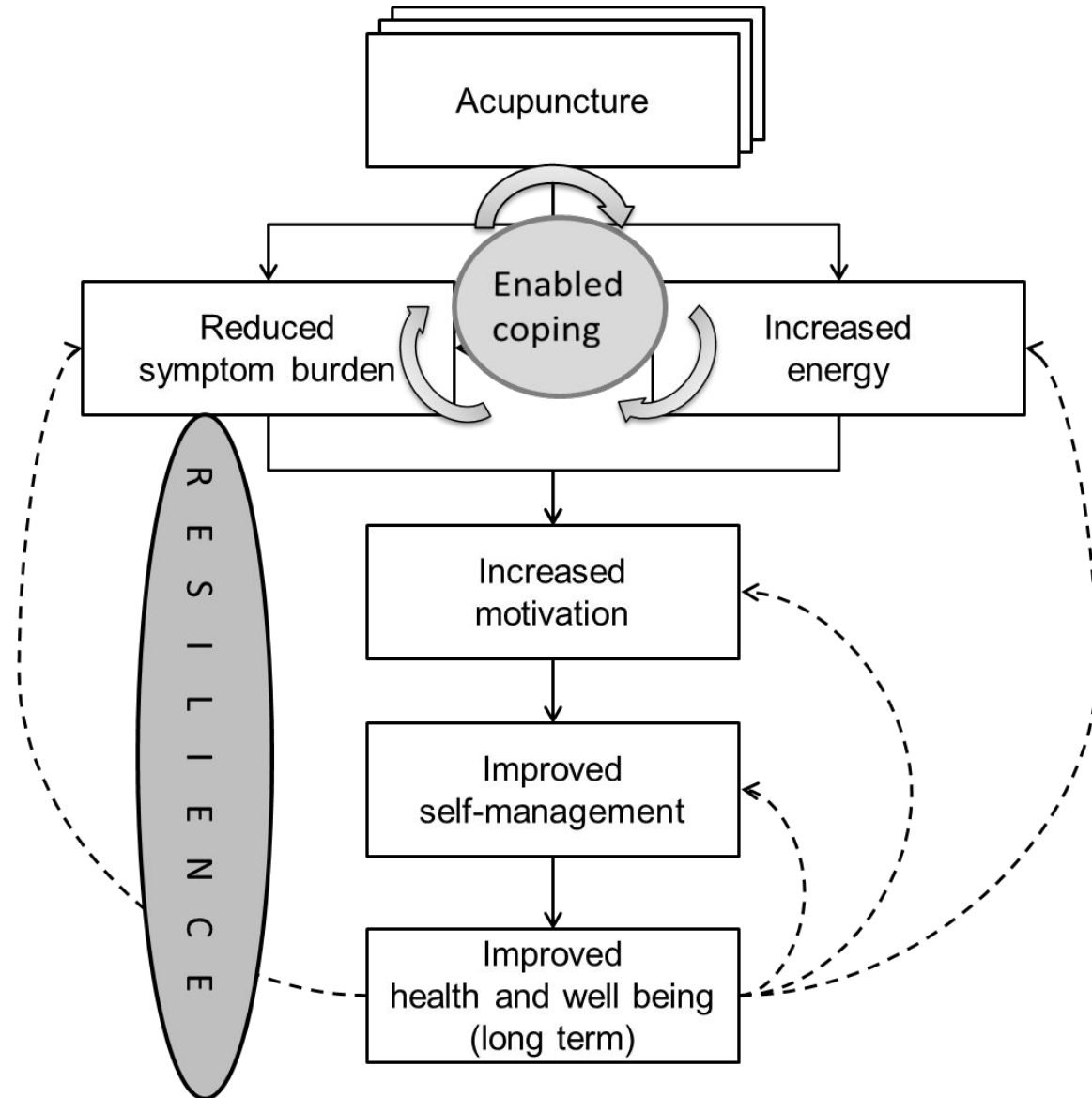


Why does it matter in cancer survivorship

- Diagnosis, treatment, survivorship, can test and develop resilience.
- Cancer survivors can lose ability to “bounce back” and cope with life.
- Some cancer centres promote the concept of developing resilience; however, this aspect of care does not receive enough attention.
- Acupuncture can play a role in developing resilience:
 - Expectations around acupuncture focus on symptom management
 - Its role in developing resilience is rarely discussed. I am choosing to discuss it here.



A model of acupuncture for improving long-term health and wellbeing and developing resilience



de Valois B, Asprey A, Young T. "The Monkey on Your Shoulder": A Qualitative Study of Lymphoedema Patients' Attitudes to and Experiences of Acupuncture and Moxibustion. *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med*. 2016;2016:4298420. doi: 10.1155/2016/4298420.

de Valois B (2023) *Acupuncture and Cancer Survivorship: Recovery, Renewal, and Transformation*. London: Singing Dragon

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Key messages about resilience

- Cancer survivors' issues and needs differ at different stages of the pathway; resilience is needed at all stages.
 - Acupuncture has the potential to support and develop resilience, as well as manage physical and emotional symptoms.
 - We need to talk more about acupuncture's potential and importance in supporting resilience.
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Safe Practice

Acupuncture in cancer care: recommendations for safe practice (peer-reviewed expert opinion)

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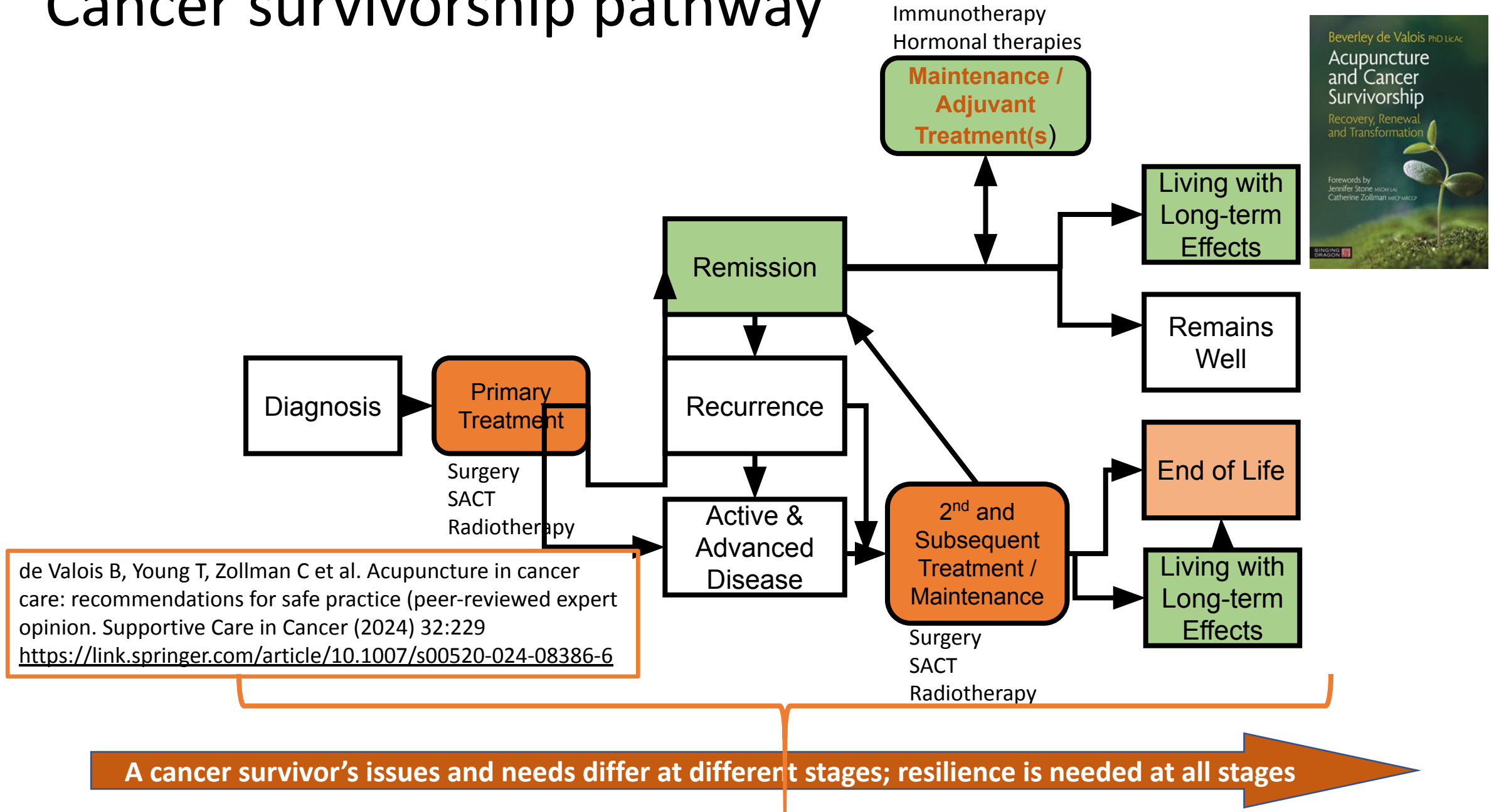
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Sections	Figure
Abstract	



Cancer survivorship pathway



Relevance to acupuncturists



Acupuncture:

- is provided in many cancer care centres
- is given to people living with and beyond cancer in situations outside of cancer centres
- Our experiences:
 - Beverley: “Cancer is scary for acupuncturists”
 - Catherine: “Acupuncture is scary for oncologists and cancer providers”
- Trusted recommendations for safe practice are helpful and reassuring to practitioners, patients, service providers and policy makers

Aims of these recommendations

- These are the first international, multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed recommendations for the safe practice of acupuncture in integrative oncology.
- They were developed to facilitate safe, appropriate clinical practice by:
 - supporting, educating and empowering **acupuncturists** to treat people with a cancer diagnosis
 - ✓ ensure accurate understanding of risks, and raise appropriate awareness of contra-indications and cautions, when using acupuncture in a cancer population.
 - ✓ enable them to offer acupuncture as a **safe, appropriate adjunct** to routine treatment and care.
 - providing reassurance and quality assurance for **oncology professionals and policy makers** not familiar with acupuncture.

Current status: Published open access and being widely disseminated.

Cite as: deValois, B., Young, T., Zollman, C. *et al.* Acupuncture in cancer care: recommendations for safe practice (peer-reviewed expert opinion). *Support Care Cancer* 32, 229 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00520-024-08386-6>

Key messages about recommend- ations for safe practice

- Download published article in Supportive Care in Cancer:
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- Communicate any comments or gaps in the recommendations for the next update:
Beverley.devalois@bristol.ac.uk

Cancer treatment-related lymphedema (CTRL)

My work with CTRL



Photo Wolfgang Pehlemann. Extended license CC-by-sa V. 3.0.

- Increase awareness of CTRL amongst the acupuncture community
 - Promote best practice.
- Increase awareness of how acupuncture can support people with and at-risk of CTRL amongst the lymphedema community and amongst people with CRTL.

ISL Stages showing lymphedema progression

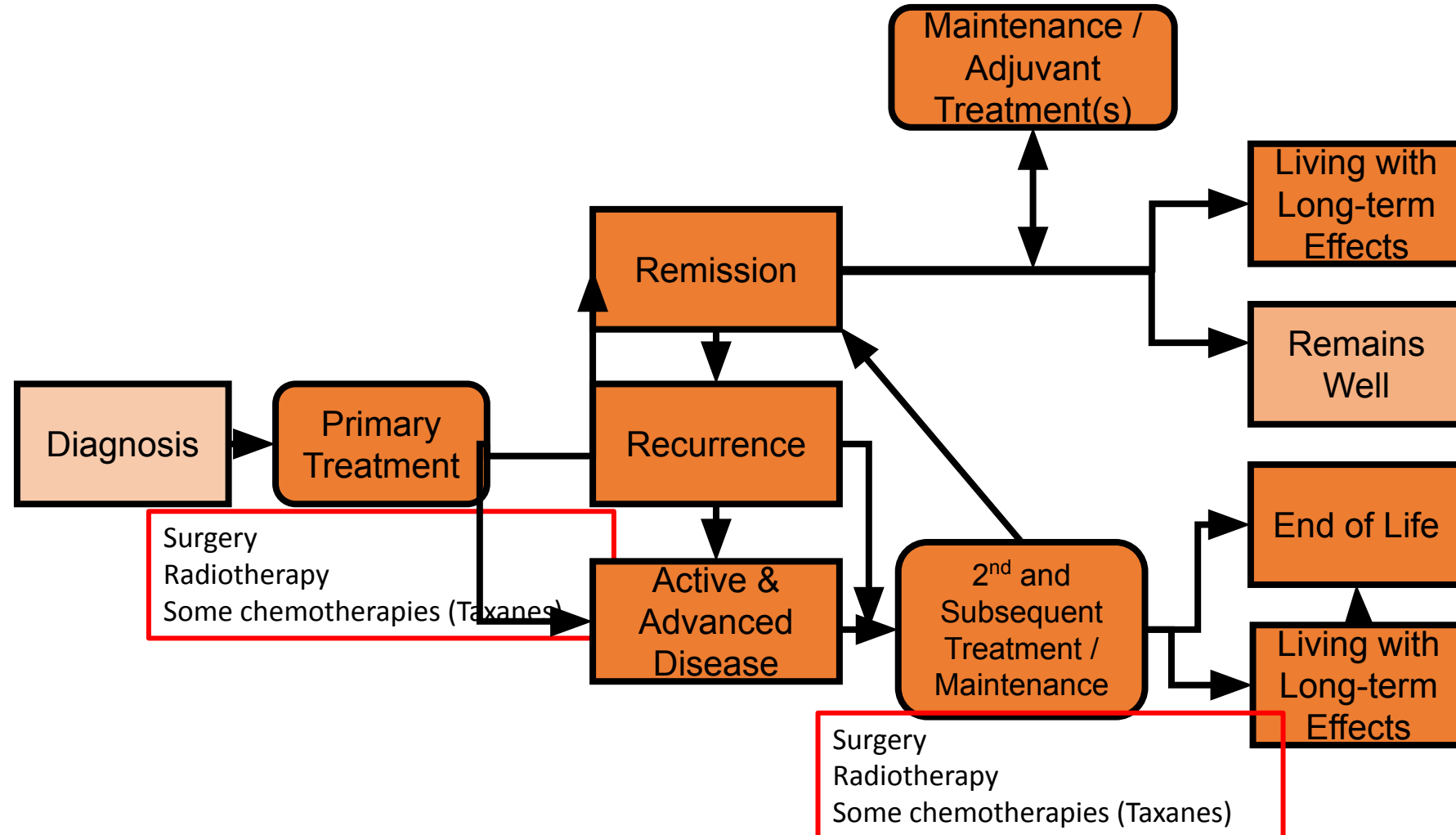
Stage 1 Stage 2 Stage 3 Stage 4				ISL Stage	Characteristics
				0	Subclinical Swelling not evident, although lymph transport is impaired. This stage may exist for months or years before swelling is evident.
				I	Early onset Accumulation of tissue fluid that subsides with limb elevation. Oedema may be pitting (firm pressure for 10 seconds of a finger or thumb on the area leaves an indentation when pressure ceases. Depth of indentation reflects severity.)
				II	Limb elevation alone rarely reduces swelling. Pitting is manifest.
				II (late stage)	Tissue fibrosis is more evident. Pitting may or may not be present.
				III	Tissue is hard (fibrotic) Pitting is absent Skin changes develop, including thickening, hyperpigmentation, increased skin folds, fat deposits, papillomatosis, or warty overgrowths.

Lymphedema: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lymphedema>

Cancer treatment-related lymphoedema (CTRL)

- "Lymphoedema is a chronic inflammatory condition that results from a failure of the lymphatic system. Consequences are swelling, skin and tissue changes and a predisposition to infection." (Mortimer)
- Chronic, incurable consequence and co-morbidity of cancer treatment.
- Affects 1 in 7 people treated for cancer (1 in 5 breast cancer).
- Often requires life-long management and specialist care.
- May be associated with potentially life-threatening infection (cellulitis).

Cancer treatment-related lymphedema*



*Lymphoedema can also be caused by cancer in lymph nodes; there are many other non-cancer related causes of lymphoedema

Why should acupuncturists know about CTRL?

“Should I allow blood-drawing from my affected limb? Vaccinations? Acupuncture? Tattoos?”

There are life-compromising and life-saving situations in which intravenous or surgical interventions on the limb at risk are unavoidable. Since there is a potential risk associated with intravenous punctures, the correct answer would be to never allow needle punctures in a situation where these are avoidable; on the other hand, if the health care team has a valid, unavoidable need to use the arm for your health, do not hesitate to give your consent. **Vaccinations, acupuncture, tattoos and all other forms of avoidable skin trauma should also be avoided in the limb at risk.”**

Rockson SG. Lymphedema. *Vasc Med* 2016;21: 77-81.

Current best practice recommendations:

- In the absence of clear evidence as to the benefit or harm of applying acupuncture to an affected limb, current best practice would advise caution and avoid needling limbs with or at-risk of lymphoedema.

de Valois, B., Young, T., Zollman, C. *et al.* Acupuncture in cancer care: recommendations for safe practice (peer-reviewed expert opinion). *Support Care Cancer* **32**, 229 (2024).

Key messages about acupuncture and CTRL

MYTH

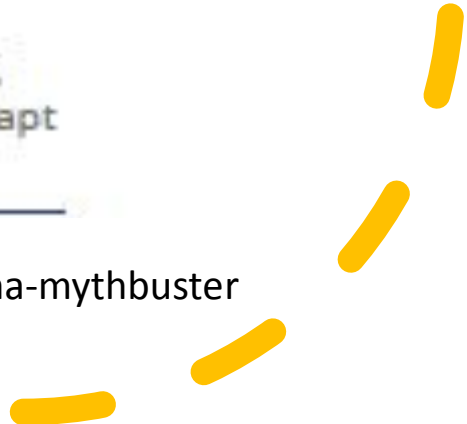
**People with lymphoedema
must not have acupuncture**

REALITY

Acupuncture is a supportive and effective therapy that can safely be used by people with or at risk of lymphoedema. While any skin puncture should be avoided in an at risk or affected area, skilled acupuncturists will know how to adapt acupuncture treatment to avoid these areas.

When you see an acupuncturist, tell them you have, or are at risk of, lymphoedema, and ask them to adapt their treatment plan accordingly.

<https://www.thebls.com/documents-library/lymphoedema-mythbuster>



Summary



You should now be able to:

- Describe the Cancer Survivorship Pathway.
- Discuss why all TEAM practitioners should be aware of cancer survivorship and the related issues.
- Discuss a model of using acupuncture for improving long-term health and wellbeing and developing resilience.
- Identify where to find recommendations for the safe practice of acupuncture in cancer care.
- Describe why acupuncturists should know about cancer-treatment related lymphedema.

Coming up soon!



- March 30 2025: Understanding cancer survivorship for Chinese Medicine practitioners
- April 6 2025: Recommendations for the safe practice of acupuncture in cancer care
- Find out more at White Pine Circle

<https://www.whitepinecommunity.org/community-events>



Thank you and questions

Find out more about my work: beverleydevalois.com