

Dreams That Can Save Your Life: Early Warning Signs of Cancer and Other Diseases

By Larry Burk, MD, CEHP, and Kathleen O’Keefe-Kanavos with a Foreword by Bernie S. Siegel, MD
Reviewed by Michael T. Greenwood, MB, BChir (MD), FCFP, CAFCI, FAAMA

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FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT read Dr. Larry Burk’s first book, *Let Magic Happen: Adventures in Healing with a Holistic Radiologist** (reviewed in *Medical Acupuncture*, Volume 25, Number 1, 2013, pp. 91–92), it is replete with the extraordinary experiences of a conventional radiologist whose intense curiosity leads him inexorably into nonrational and integrative ways of understanding illness and health. Now, Dr. Burk has teamed up with dream expert Kathleen O’Keefe-Kanavos (Kat) on a marvelous follow-up, *Dreams That Can Save Your Life: Early Warning Signs of Cancer and Other Diseases*, to explore the topic of how dreams can impart vital medical information.

President of Healing Imager, P.C., in Durham, NC, Dr. Burk, MD, CEHP, specializes in teleradiology, the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), hypnosis, and dreamwork. He is a cofounder of the Duke University Center for Integrative Medicine, also in Durham, and is currently a consulting associate in radiology at Duke University, also in Durham. Larry is trained in acupuncture as well, and clearly enjoys exploring unusual medical phenomena. Kat is a teacher, lecturer, and television host and producer. She is also a three-time cancer survivor, whose guided dreams helped diagnose her illness. She is the author of *Surviving Cancerland: Intuitive Aspects of Healing*.†

The *Dreams* book is divided into 9 parts. In the Introduction, the authors mention the autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR), which refers to an experience of “low-grade euphoria,” when something rings true. This experience can give rise to a tingling that starts in the back

of the head and travels down the arms and spine. From an acupuncture perspective, ASMR is like energy originating from GV 16 or GV 20 and engaging the *Du Mai* and other Extraordinary Meridians.

In part 1, Larry and Kat give their personal stories, talk about how difficult it was to get funding for the dream research, and explore how dreams can be classified into: daydreams, nightmares, lucid, recurring, healing, epic, precognitive, symbolic, and waking dreams. No matter how they are named, the trick to using dreams effectively is, first, the ability to recall them and, second, knowing how to discover their meaning.

Part 2 goes on to describe a number of precognitive dreams from people who volunteered for the Breast Cancer Dreams Research Project. One way or another, the dreams cited from this project were all powerful pointers. For example, in one case a woman managed to persuade her physician to do a biopsy at a specific site revealed in a dream. Despite a negative mammogram and ultrasound, the biopsy proved to be positive.

At the end of each chapter in this part, the authors review the recounted dream, Kat from a dream therapist’s viewpoint, and Larry from a medical standpoint (often adding a little Chinese Medicine constitutional typing as well). I found the reviews provided a grounding counterbalance to the dreamers’ stories, which, understandably, tended to be a little angst-ridden. As the authors point out, the medical challenge facing each of the patients eventually became their saviors by (1) encouraging earlier testing from skeptical physicians and (2) motivating the patients to follow their hearts rather than their heads.

Part 3 explores dreams that were predictive of other kinds of cancers, ranging from brain to colon and from ovary to prostate.

The authors offer methods of enhancing dream recall in part 4, using a useful mnemonic device, SODREAM (Set intention, Organize, Dream, Remain, Emotion, Add, Meaning).

*Durham, NC: Healing Imager Press; 2012.

†Fort Bragg, CA: Cypress House; 2014.

Part 5 surveys other interesting dreams.

Part 6 offers an investigation into the healing guidance that arises out of dreams.

Bernie S. Seigel, MD, author of *Love, Medicine & Miracles: Lessons Learned About Self-Healing from a Surgeon's Experience with Exceptional Patients*‡ contributes a section in part 7 about children he saw over his years as a pediatric surgeon. One memorable case was a patient with large neck lymph nodes that were thought perhaps to be a lymphoma. However, then, the patient drew 2 pictures—one of her swollen neck and the second of a cat with large claws. She turned out to have cat-scratch disease.

In Part 8, the authors explain how some dreams can relate to other people rather than the dreamers themselves.

Part 9 develops a vision for future research.

The book then concludes with a couple of appendices that offer a useful glossary and biographies of contributors.

This is an extraordinary collection of stories, and after reading them, it is hard to refute the notion that dreams can offer profound insights and realizations to people who

choose to pay attention. The “take home” message that Larry and Kat dare to suggest is that physicians should resist the urge to dismiss dreams, quirks, intuitions, and hunches that patients volunteer. This proposal might be a bit challenging to bring about within our current system, but, evidently, this is not impossible.

Anyone who has enjoyed Larry and Kat's other books, will find this one equally hard to put down. It is both a fascinating read and a heartfelt call to physicians to embrace a larger perspective—a notion that many medical acupuncturists would endorse. I thoroughly recommend this book.

Address correspondence to:

Michael T. Greenwood
MB, BChir (MD), FCFP, CAFCI, FAAMA
103-284 Helmcken Road
Victoria, British Columbia V9B 1T2
Canada

E-mail: michaelgreenwood@shaw.ca

‡New York: HarperPerennial; 1998.