Purpose: A best-case series review is an efficient tool with which to screen complex complementary and alternative treatments for cancer as candidates for further study. Study Design: The National Cancer Institute and other agencies have adopted the best-case series method to evaluate cancer treatments involving complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) for further study. The authors conducted a best-case series review of the Hufeland Klinik. Established in 1985 in Bad Mergentheim, Germany, this facility treats more than 500 cancer patients per year. Hufeland treatment includes dietary modification, injections, ozone therapy, active fever therapy, psychotherapy, and sometimes hormone therapy and/or low-dose chemotherapy. The goal of the treatment is to prolong survival and to maintain good quality of life. Methods: The clinic provided summaries of 27 cases in which patients with longer than expected survival had agreed to make their medical records available for review. The review involved pathologic confirmation of disease and radiologic confirmation of complete response (CR) or partial response (PR) not attributable to conventional treatment. Results: Based on the summaries and an exhaustive 2-year search for medical records, slides, and imaging data, 12 of 27 cases were selected for full review, and 5 (3 CRs and 2 PRs) were judged best cases. Conclusion: Most patients with common cancers receive conventional treatment before coming to Hufeland, and many are treated with chemotherapy and/or hormonal therapy while there. Hence, only a few could be considered for review. With 5 of 12 patients showing a treatment response, the authors conclude that the Hufeland treatment merits further study. They also recommend the development of criteria with which to evaluate best-case series reviews of complex CAM treatments for patients with advanced cancer.

Keywords: cancer; best-case series; complementary; alternative; holistic; complete response; partial response; survival

In the past decade, support for research on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) for cancer has grown dramatically, and numerous clinical trials of herbal agents and specific CAM procedures have been undertaken or completed. The most successful candidates for research funds have been investigators who proposed studies of standardized single-modality interventions for which conventional research methods are well suited. Claims regarding the benefits of complex treatments customized to each patient are more difficult to evaluate. Many cancer clinics outside the United States provide such treatments, especially to patients who have failed to benefit from conventional treatment.

Few providers at CAM cancer clinics have research training or even a reliable charting system, but some are willing to allow outside investigators to study their treatments and results. Because conventional clinical research methods cannot be readily applied to the assessment of most CAM cancer clinics, the best-case series method has come into use to identify those facilities whose patients might have fared better than expected and to evaluate them as candidates for further study.

First proposed by the Office of Technology Assessment in 1990, the best-case series method was adopted by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in 1991 for preliminary evaluation of complex CAM cancer therapies for which claims of efficacy were made. The NCI Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine Web site publishes the guidelines “The Preparation of Best Case Series and the Conduct of Pilot Clinical Trials Using CAM Modalities.” The
Cancer Outcomes in a Best-Case Series

Best cases also must fulfill at least 1 of the following outcome criteria:

- Complete response (CR): complete disappearance of all evidence of tumor for a set number of weeks.
- Partial response (PR): decrease by ≥50% in the sum of the products of the perpendicular diameters of all measured lesions in the absence of progression of any sites or the appearance of any new lesions for a set number of weeks.

Many cases proposed for a best-case series are those involving longer than expected survival based on data for age and stage from the medical literature or a population-based registry, such as the NCI’s Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results database. However, although survival with good quality of life is the primary aim of cancer treatment, it is not interpretable as evidence of efficacy in an uncontrolled case series.7

In this report, we describe the results of our assessment of a best-case series submitted by Wolfgang Woeppel, MD, founder and director of the Hufeland Klinik in Bad Mergentheim, Germany, to the National Foundation for Alternative Medicine (NFAM). Since 1998, NFAM has been visiting clinics that use CAM and inviting them to submit best cases. Of some 60 clinics reviewed in the first 2 years of this program, the Hufeland Klinik was found to be the most rigorous in its record keeping. Hufeland also has an international reputation that draws patients from the United States as well as other countries. For those reasons, it was selected for review.

Methods

Review Procedure
The study was approved by the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center Institutional Review Board. Dr Woeppel selected the cases for review, obtained informed consent and permission to obtain medical records from the participating patients, and provided a summary of each case. The reviewers eliminated cases that, based on the summary, did not fulfill best-case criteria. For the remainder, in addition to reviewing the records on file at the Hufeland Klinik, we requested medical records including pathology slides and radiologic examinations from all the other institutions where the patient had received diagnostic assessment or cancer treatment. After document texts were translated into English, the cases were reviewed by the investigative team, including oncologists, pathologists, and radiologists at the Herbert Irving Comprehensive Cancer Center of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University. The purpose of the pathology review was to confirm the cancer diagnosis of each case. Radiologists reviewed imaging studies in various formats to assess patients’ status before and after the Hufeland Klinik treatment. The team then identified those cases that fit the best-case criteria.

The Practitioner
Wolfgang Woeppel, MD, graduated from the medical school at the University of Wuerzburg (Bavaria, Germany) in 1971. Board certified in internal medicine (1978) and naturopathy (1984), he also studied acupuncture and neural therapy. From 1976 to 1982, he was a senior physician in the Department of Internal Medicine at Mosbach Regional Hospital (Baden, Germany). From 1982 to 1984, he worked with Josef M. Issels, MD, who developed and practiced a holistic approach to cancer therapy, at the Ringberg Klinik in Tegernsee, in the Bavarian Alps of Germany.6 Dr Issels’s theories and methods have greatly influenced alternative cancer treatment programs in Europe and Mexico.7

The Hufeland Klinik
Established by Dr Woeppel in 1985, the Hufeland Klinik has treated more than 3000 inpatients and 500 outpatients and currently treats about 500 inpatients and 120 outpatients per year. The Klinik is located in Bad Mergentheim, a well-known health resort area famous for its mineral springs, in southwestern Germany near Heidelberg, Frankfurt, and Nuremberg.

Most patients who come to Hufeland have cancer. Hufeland treats all malignant diseases except acute leukemias, regardless of stage and prognosis. The Klinik also treats patients with some other diseases; it treats adults and children older than 5 years.

The Philosophy
According to theories first described by Alfred Pischinger,7 the body’s most important systems (eg, the autonomic nervous system, hormones, blood and...
lymph vessels, and connective tissue) comprise an interdependent network. Dr Woeppel views cancer as involving both cells and their interaction with this network, which constitutes their environment. Under conditions such as infection and psychological distress, the environment may cease to prevent cancer cells from proliferating. Under more favorable conditions, the environment may become conducive to apoptosis or redifferentiation of cancer cells. Treatment at Hufeland, therefore, does not primarily target the tumor, as conventional cancer treatment does, but focuses on the tumor’s environment.

The Treatment
Upon admission, each patient is examined by a physician and has an electrocardiogram, ultrasound imaging, routine laboratory studies, and, in some cases, a chest x-ray. Depending on the results of these studies, patients may receive the basic treatment alone or with fever therapy or conventional treatment.

Basic Treatment
Basic treatment consists of the following.

Biological treatment. All patients receive daily subcutaneous or intramuscular injections of homeopathic agents, vitamins, and herbal agents and nonspecific immune stimulators (echinacea, mistletoe, fresh thymus, and microbial extracts). Proteolytic pancreatic enzymes; probiotics (symbiotic intestinal bacterial flora supplements); vitamins A, C, E; and selenium are administered orally. Twice a week, patients receive ozone therapy (autologous blood is incubated with a mixture of oxygen and ozone and/or irradiated by ultraviolet light and then reinfused) followed by an intravenous infusion. The intravenous infusion contains trace elements (magnesium, selenium, zinc), homeopathics, high-dose vitamins, and plant- or microbial-derived agents intended to eliminate toxins, alter metabolism, and stimulate the nonspecific immune system.

The basic program also includes dental work to eliminate mucosal pockets; dead, root-filled, or impacted teeth; and, if possible, amalgams. If tonsils show signs of chronic inflammation, tonsillectomy is recommended. Patients are also offered enemas, lime-blossom and other herbal teas, and herbal and homeopathic remedies. Patients with constipation or digestive problems are encouraged to drink from Bad Mergentheim’s healing springs to activate bile flow and/or stimulate bowel movements.

Diet. All patients follow a low-fat lactovegetarian diet high in vegetables and whole grains, with some fruit. They are allowed (but not encouraged) to eat 1 serving of meat or fish per week. Frequent small meals are recommended for seriously ill patients. Patients are encouraged to avoid tobacco, caffeine, and alcohol.

Physical therapy. Nearly every day, patients receive hydrotherapy (cold water treatments and hot showers), reflexology, massages, or special treatments with electric fields.

Oxygen therapy. For at least 2 hours each day, most patients inhale oxygen; they continue to do so after discharge.

Psychotherapy. Dr Woeppel states, “Anyone for whom life is unconsciously a burden logically has no real reason to get well, and his autonomic nervous system is programmed for death.” Therefore, Hufeland offers patients a variety of approaches to help reduce the undesirable stress in their lives. Dr Woeppel conducts weekly group hypnosis sessions to influence the unconscious and to support the patient’s will to get healthy again. A psychologist and an art therapist offer individual and group therapy sessions. Other modalities include deep relaxation exercises, respiratory biofeedback, imagery, color therapy, group singing, and walks and hikes.

Pain relief. Hufeland emphasizes the importance of complete pain relief. Conventional analgesics, as well as acupuncture, therapeutic local anesthesia, infrared (warming) therapy, subcutaneous carbon dioxide injections, and physical therapy are used for pain relief.

Fever Therapy
Patients who have no serious comorbid conditions may receive active fever therapy, in which Coley’s toxins (bacterial lipopolysaccharides and other agents) are injected intravenously. Patients usually experience chills, nausea, vomiting, or headache within about 20 minutes, along with a slow rise in body temperature. The temperature should remain at 40°C or higher for several hours.

Conventional Modalities
In addition, patients without comorbid conditions may receive surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or hormonal therapy. The goal of such treatment is not so much to destroy the tumor as to suppress it enough to allow the host to keep it under control. Hence, patients who undergo chemotherapy at Hufeland usually receive lower doses or a shorter course of treatment than they would under a conven-
tional protocol. Some patients receive chemotherapy along with passive hyperthermia by pulsed electromagnetic field to about 43°C, applied either locally (eg, to treat liver metastases, prostate cancer, or abdominal tumors) or to the whole body. Most patients with breast cancer or prostate cancer receive hormonal therapy.

**Results**

Initially, Dr Woeppel submitted reports of 27 cancer cases. Based on these reports, we selected 12 cases for review. Table 1 lists the 12 cases that were reviewed. Of these, 5 met the criteria for best cases.

**Pathology Review**

Table 2 compares the original histologic interpretation to that of the reviewing pathologist for each of the 12 potential best cases. In 6 of the 12 cases, the reviewing pathologist confirmed the original interpretation. In colon cancer case 1, the pathology reviewer’s diagnosis differed from that in the original report regarding tumor type, but the differences were not relevant to prognosis. In ovarian cancer case 1, the reviewer’s diagnosis differed from the original regarding the site of origin and was more consistent than the original with the indolent course of the disease. In mediastinum cancer case 1, the reviewer’s diagnosis also differed slightly from that in the original report regarding tumor type, but the material was obtained by bronchoscopy and was too limited in quantity for a firm histologic diagnosis.

In 3 of 4 brain tumor cases, the histologic diagnosis differed. For this reason, the brain tumor cases were also reviewed separately by a pathologist at the NCI (Table 2). The NCI reviewer noted that prior treatment with chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy in cases 1 and 3 made firm histologic diagnoses difficult. The differences between the original pathologists and the reviewing pathologists did not appear to follow any specific pattern.

**Radiology Review**

Table 3 shows the results of the radiology review of the available films and the radiologists’ conclusions regarding tumor response. Three patients were judged to have a complete response and 3 to have a partial response. However, in 1 of the latter (brain cancer case 2), the patient had received radiation therapy (without evidence of benefit at the time) shortly before coming to Hufeland and was therefore not categorized as a best case.

Table 4 lists the 15 cases that were excluded from the best-case series review. Of these, 7 (3 colon cancer cases, 1 stage III and 2 stage IV; 2 sarcoma cases; 1 lung cancer case; and 1 melanoma case) were excluded because the presence of malignant disease was not confirmed at the time treatment was initiated. Four cases (all 3 cases with advanced breast cancer and 1 with ovarian cancer) were excluded because they received conventional therapy (hormonal therapy or chemotherapy) shortly before or during treatment at Hufeland, 3 because of disease progression (an ovarian cancer case) or lack of a partial response to treatment (a stomach cancer case and a lung cancer case), and 1 (an ovarian cancer case) because slides were unavailable for pathology review. (In Germany, slides may be discarded after 10 years.)

**Discussion**

Since 1985, about 3000 individuals have been treated for cancer at Hufeland. Although some of these patients achieved remission and remain well, many, including all patients with metastatic breast cancer or prostate cancer, were ineligible for inclusion in the best-case series because they had received conventional and CAM treatment at Hufeland simultaneously. This exclusion limits best-case series review to patients who have cancers for which no conventional treatment is known, refuse conventional treatment, or wait a sufficient time after receiving conventional treatment for restaging to verify treatment failure. Yet many patients whose disease is spreading and not responding to treatment begin immediately to explore alternatives. Moreover, although potential best cases cannot be evaluated unless they have had repeat imaging just prior to starting the CAM treatment, complete restaging is not always performed at this time in clinical practice. The best-case series, therefore, shares many of the difficulties of any retrospective review. As Table 1 shows, even the patients whose cases we reviewed wasted little time between failing (or being failed by) conventional treatment and seeking treatment at Hufeland.

The best-case series approach to CAM treatments for cancer requires pathologic confirmation of the cancer diagnosis, evidence that cancer was present at the time the CAM treatment was initiated, no recent conventional treatment, and evidence of complete or partial response. These requirements are reasonable but not easy to fulfill. Old charts and scans are often difficult to find. Scans that are not necessary for the patient’s treatment might not be covered by insurance. And few CAM practitioners, especially those who are not also conventional physicians, require patients to document their cancer diagnosis or interact routinely with the conventional physicians who treat their patients.
| Primary Site and Case Number | Age at Last Visit | Gender | Diagnosis | Date of Conventional Treatment | Conventional Treatment | First Visit to Hufeland | Status at First Visit | Last Contact | Outcome/Status at Last Contact |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--------|-----------|--------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Best cases                  |                  |        |           |                                |                        |                        |                      |              |                                |
| Melanoma 1 (skin of arm)    | 51/F             | 1985   | Surgery: primary removed 1985, jejunal metastases resected Jun 1989 and Nov 1990 | Nov 1990              | Mar 1991                | Unresectable pelvic mass, poor nutritional condition, pencil-thin stools, poor appetite, fatigue | Apr 1996            | Condition improved, expired Apr 1997, PR |
| Brain 1                     | 43/M             | Oct 1987 | 2 subtotal resections, radiation therapy, BCNU | Second craniotomy, Aug 1988 | Oct 1988                | Poor short-term memory, disorientation, fatigue, difficulty writing, gait drift to left, seizures | Jul 1996            | Initially condition improved, expired from stroke Jul 1996, PR |
| Urinary bladder 1           | 58/M             | May 1989 | None      | NA                             | Jul 1989                | 5-cm tumor in right side of bladder, right hydronephrosis, dilated right ureter | 2002                | Alive and well, CR |
| Melanoma 2 (skin of thigh)  | 35/M             | Apr 1991 | Surgery: multiple resections skin, SQ fat, regional lymph nodes | Mar 1992              | Apr 1992                | Palpable tumors close to scars of previous surgery | Feb 2002            | Alive and well, working as engineer, CR |
| Colon 1                     | 51/M             | Jun 1994 | Surgery, 5FU/leucovorin | Mar 1995              | Apr 1995                | Liver metastases, unresectable | Mar 2002            | Alive and well, CR |
| Not best cases              |                  |        |           |                                |                        |                        |                      |              |                                |
| Brain 2 (pineal)            | 15/M             | Sep 1982 | Radiation therapy Sep-Dec 1982, drainage procedures to Jan 1983 | Jan 1983              | Jan 1983                | Scan Jan 1983 showed tumor size doubled since Sep 1982, diplopia, trunk and extremity ataxia | Jun 2002            | Alive, clinical improvement, MS diagnosed 1995; improvement might have been due to RT |
| Brain 3                     | 52/F             | Jan 1983 | Surgery, preoperative radiation therapy, pre-/postoperative BCNU | Nov 1983              | (Ringberg) Nov 1983     | Tumor present on CT, paresthesias/dysesthesias left hand, abnormal reflexes, reduced general condition | Nov 1989            | Clinical improvement, expired Nov 1989; no PR |
| Brain 4                     | 3/M              | Aug 1985 | Subtotal resection, radiation therapy | RT Sep-Dec 1985        | Mar 1986                | Residual tumor by MRI Feb 28, 1986, poor condition | Apr 2001            | Alive, vision impaired, mentally and physically in good condition; no PR |
| Case     | Age/Gender | Date of Diagnosis | Treatment / Response | Date of Follow-up | Status          |
|----------|------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Ovary 1  | 52/F       | Jan 1988          | Surgery              | Jul 1988          | Liver metastases Jul 1999 Progressed; expired Jul 1999 |
| Ovary 2  | 36/F       | Apr 1996          | Surgery, mitomycin, then stem-cell transplant Aug 1996 | Apr 1997 | CA125 = 94.3 (elevated), but no evidence of disease on imaging 2002 Alive and well CA125 = 13.8; no evidence of disease at first visit |
| Mediastinum 1 | 52/M  | Nov 1991         | 1 cycle epirubicin/cytosar/oncovin, radiation therapy Mar 1992 | Aug 1992 | Unresectable mediastinal tumor 2001 Clinical improvement, stable through 1999, expired 2001; no PR |
| Mesothelioma 1 (pleura) | 54/M | Oct 1994 | Surgery, 1 cycle ifosfamide, talc pleurodesis Nov 1994 | Jan 1995 | Severe exertional dyspnea, slight nonproductive cough, postoperative weight loss of about 5 kg Apr 1998 Clinical improvement, expired 1998; no PR |

PR = partial response; BCNU = 1,3 bis(2-chloroethyl)-1-nitrosourea; NA = not applicable; CR = complete response; SQ = subcutaneous; MS = multiple sclerosis; RT = radiation therapy; CT = computed tomography; MRI = magnetic resonance imaging.
Due in part to legal and regulatory constraints on the provision of unconventional cancer treatments in the United States, many of the clinics that offer such treatments are based elsewhere. Linguistic and cultural differences add to the difficulty of obtaining documentation for a best-case series.

Staff and consultants at the NFAM selected the Hufeland Klinik for review in part because its medical records were far more complete and organized than those of most clinics they had visited. Dr Woeppel was also highly cooperative in providing additional records from Hufeland upon request. He obtained authorization from patients for retrieval of additional documents, histology, and imaging material and assisted in the retrieval process, which nonetheless took 2 years.

The most compelling candidates for a best-case series are patients who have survived for many years after their initial diagnosis. But for those patients, the documentation trail is often cold; specimens, slides, and films may have deteriorated or been lost; and treating physicians may have retired or relocated. In the Hufeland series, many of the computed tomography scans that were reviewed by our radiologists came from first-generation scanners and were of limited quality; the settings of images on some magnetic resonance imaging studies posed additional challenges for the reviewing radiologists. Some of the digital images derived from radiographic films for the best-case series review were also of poor quality.

Table 2. Results of Pathology Review

| Primary Site and Case Number | Original Histologic Diagnosis | Histologic Diagnosis on Review |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Melanoma 1                  | Melanoma                     | Melanoma                     |
| Brain 1                     | Anaplastic gemistocytic astrocytoma | Anaplastic gemistocytic astrocytoma |
| Bladder 1                   | Transitional cell carcinoma  | Transitional cell carcinoma  |
| Melanoma 2                  | Melanoma                     | Melanoma                     |
| Colon 1                     | Adenosquamous carcinoma, poorly differentiated | Adenosquamous carcinoma, poorly differentiated |
| Brain 2 (pineal)            | Malignant glioma             | Malignant astrocytoma         |
| Brain 3                     | Malignant brain tumor        | Anaplastic astrocytoma (grade III) |
| Brain 4                     | Kernohan astrocytoma grade II| Anaplastic astrocytoma (grade III) |
| Ovary 1                     | Cystic ovarian cancer at the base of a pseudomucinous cystoma with extensive peritoneal pseudomyxoma | Cystic ovarian cancer at the base of a pseudomucinous cystoma with extensive peritoneal pseudomyxoma |
| Ovary 2                     | Papillary serous carcinoma   | Papillary serous carcinoma   |
| Mediastinum 1               | Malignant mixed              | Bronchogenic carcinoma in malignant mixed tumor |
| Mesothelioma 1              | Mesothelioma                 | Mesothelioma                 |

Brain cancer cases 1 through 4 were rereviewed by Martha Quezado, MD, National Cancer Institute pathologist. Her diagnoses were brain 1: residual tumor high grade with gemistocytic features; brain 2: pineal parenchymal tumor of intermediate differentiation; brain 3: radiation changes with residual tumor, most likely high grade; brain 4: pilocytic astrocytoma.

Among the cases submitted by Dr Woeppel but either not considered best cases or excluded from the review, were many who had arguably longer survival than would be expected given their conventional treatment or their status at presentation. The 5 best cases also improved clinically and survived longer than would be expected for patients with the same disease and stage. However, they are not the only Hufeland patients with better than expected survival, and duration of survival is not a criterion for best-case status.

The best-case series methodology came into use as a tool for evaluating complex unconventional cancer therapies as candidates for further study. Ideally, such preliminary reviews should be reasonably quick and inexpensive. Our team took more than 2 years to assemble the case records and to complete the imaging and histology review. However, it is difficult to imagine how the Hufeland approach and that of other similar cancer clinics could be initially evaluated without such a case review.

A strength of the methodology is that it permits the evaluation of holistic, multimodality approaches. However, having participated in this best-case series review, Dr Woeppel has come to see some merit in developing an evidence-based standardized treatment that other cancer facilities could adopt.

Bringing the Hufeland approach in its present form to the United States would not be easy. Some elements of the program are not available in the United States because of Food and Drug Administration regulations, physicians’ lack of training in certain methods, and lack of insurance coverage for them.

The best-case methodology evaluates the success of a therapy in inducing a tumor response. But the Hufeland basic treatment program does not target the tumor and has no specific cytotoxic components. Tumor response is, from Hufeland’s perspective, neither necessary nor sufficient; the Klinik’s mission is to help patients to survive with good quality of life, and Dr Woeppel selected cases for review with that mission.
in mind. However, he understood the requirements of the review and accepted them.

The 27 cases that he selected were those in which patients survived longer than expected and agreed to provide access to their conventional medical records. The 12 cases that we reviewed were those that appeared to meet the NCI best-case series criteria based on the case summary. Where necessary, we then sought additional documentation. (We excluded only 1 case for lack of such documentation.)

Best-case series are not designed to permit calculation of a response rate. A recent report of 2 best-case series prepared for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality did not present response rates but recommended consideration of further study of both modalities. For 1 modality, 9 of 30 cases were judged to meet the criteria; for the other, 3 of 21 were similarly judged. In both reviews, the cases involved cancers of several different organ/sites and a lengthy effort to obtain medical records.24

To calculate a response rate in our study, we would have had to review the charts of all 3000 cancer patients seen at Hufeland since 1985, to eliminate all those with recent or concurrent potentially curative conventional treatment, to document the status of the cancer at the time the patient first came to Hufeland,

| Primary Site and Case Number | Modality | Dates       | Findings                                                                 |
|------------------------------|----------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Brain 1                      | CT brain | Sep 1988    | S/P subtotal resection, cannot exclude residual tumor                    |
| Brain 1                      | CT brain | May 1996    | Recent, evolving, right MCA infarct on CT; no evidence of tumor but no contrast; residual tumor not ruled out |
| Bladder 1                    | CT pelvis| May 1989    | 5-cm bladder mass, dilated R ureter and R hydronephrosis                |
| Bladder 1                    | U/S pelvis| Oct 2001    | R ureter questionably dilated distally, otherwise normal               |
| Melanoma 2                   | MRI thigh| Oct 1992    | Soft tissue masses in SQ down to muscle in right medial thigh           |
| Melanoma 2                   | MRI thigh| May 1993    | Defects same location, postoperative changes, melanoma may still be present |
| CT                           | Feb 2002 |             | No evidence of malignancy chest, abdomen, pelvis; limited lung field evaluation due to data compression on transfer |
| Colon 1                      | CT abdomen| Mar 1995    | Abdominal CT: 3 metastatic foci persist in liver                       |
| Colon 1                      | CT pelvis| Oct 1989    | Abdominal CT: no evidence of metastatic disease                        |
| Brain 2                      | CT without contrast | Jan 1983 | Pineal tumor doubled in size involving adjoining structures, extending into thalamus |
| Primary site/Diagnosis | Age at Diagnosis/ Gender | Date of Diagnosis | Conventional Treatment/ Date of Conventional Treatment | First Visit to Hufeland | Status at First Visit | Status at Last Contact/Date | Reason for Exclusion From Review |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Breast 1, infiltrating papillary, pTnP0N0M0, receptor status unknown | 41/F | 1985 | Apr 1985 mastectomy; Sep 1988 and Dec 1988 resection of chest wall recurrences, Sep 1989 resection lymph node metastases; Oct-Nov 1989 radiation therapy; Oct 1989-Oct 1991 Zoladex; Dec 1991 resection lymph node metastases; Jan-May 1992, cyclophosphamide/methotrexate/5FU (CMF); Jun 1992-Jan 1994 tamoxifen; Feb 1994 radiation therapy; Feb 1995 and Jul 1995 lymph node resection; Sep 1995 skin biopsy, Oct-Nov 1995 RT skin metastases | Aug 1996 | Extensive skin metastases, palpable lymph node metastases | Alive and well, working Sep 1999 | Chemo therapy (low-dose Ixoten) at Hufeland |
| Breast 2, invasive ductal, ER+ | 51/F | 1991 | Oct 1991 left mastectomy, Nov 1991-1995 tamoxifen, Jan-Nov 1995 CMF, 5FU/epirubicin/cyclophosphamide (FEC), velban/mitomycin/prednisone (VMP) | May 1996 | Lung metastases, malignant pleural effusion, skin metastases, left arm lymph edema | Alive and well Mar 1999 | Chemo therapy (low-dose Ixoten) and hormonal therapy (Lentaron) at Hufeland |
| Breast 3, invasive ductal, ER+, PR+ | 35/F | 1996 | Jun 1996 mastectomy, Jun-Nov 1996 4x EC, 3X CMF, Jul 1987 chest CT: lung metastases, Aug-Dec 1997 paclitaxel | Jan 1998 | Lung metastases on chest CT, patient refuses high-dose chemotherapy | Alive and well Jan 1999 | Hormonal therapy (Zoladex and tamoxifen) at Hufeland |
| Ovary 3, adenopapillary with peritoneal carcinomatosis | 25/F | 1968 | Nov 1968 total abdominal hysterectomy and bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy (TAHBSO), cyclophosphamide X 10; Jun 1982 cyclophosphamide; Oct 1984 platinum/adriamycin/cyclophosphamide (PAC); Apr 1985 radiation therapy to entire abdomen for tumor cells in peritoneal fluid | Mar 1987 | Peritoneal metastases on laparoscopic biopsy Dec 1986 | Kidney cancer Jan 1999, pancreatic cancer Apr 1999, expired Aug 1999 | Histology slides unobtainable |
| Ovary 4, papillary cystadenocarcinoma invading myometrium and omentum | 56/F | 1982 | Feb 1982 TAHBSO, omentum resection, Mar 1982 chemo therapy; Jan 1989 abdominal wall metastasis; Feb-May 1989 chemotherapy 5 cycles; Nov 1991 extirpation of abdominal wall and pubic bone metastases | Sep 1989 | Abdominal wall metastases, tumor size unchanged on CT Sep 1989 | Alive and well Feb 1999 | Progression and surgery after Hufeland treatment started |
| Ovary 5, cystadenocarcinoma, endometrioid | 36/F | 1987 | Jul 1987 surgery, Jul-Oct 1987 CMF chemotherapy, Oct 1987 laparoscopy: biopsy positive carcinomatosis, Oct 1987 PAC chemotherapy 1 cycle | Nov 1987 | Status post 1 cycle PAC for carcinomatosis | Alive and well May 1997 | PAC 26 days before start at Hufeland |
| Lung 1, small-cell carcinoma with mediastinal lymph node metastases, pT3pN2pM0pG3 | 68/M | 1989 | Nov 1989 left pneumonectomy, Nov 1989-Feb 1990 adriamycin/cyclophosphamide/ vincristine (ACO) 3X, Jul 1990 radiation therapy for brain metastasis | Mar 1990 | General weakness, heartburn, left shoulder discomfort | Alive and well Feb 1998 | No evidence of disease at first visit; progression after Hufeland treatment started |
| Tissue Type | Gender | Age | Date of Diagnosis | Treatment Details | Date of Follow-up | Clinical Status | Notes |
|-------------|--------|-----|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|-------|
| Lung 2, poorly differentiated adenocarcinoma, T4N2 | 64/M | 1995 | Feb-Mar 1996 | Radiation therapy (60 Gy) | Apr 1997 | Suspicion of progression | Alive and well May 2000 | No tumor response after Hufeland treatment started |
| Colon 2, moderately differentiated adenocarcinoma, pT3pN1MxG2 | 66/F | 1988 | Apr 1988 | Sigmoid resection, Oct 1988 liver metastases resected, Jun 1989 lung metastases resected | Jul 1989 | No evidence of cancer | Alive and well Feb 1999 | No evidence of disease at first visit |
| Colon 3, moderately differentiated nonmucinous adenocarcinoma, pT3,N0,M1 | 63/F | 1991 | Jan 1991 | Hemicolectomy and resection liver metastasis; Jan 1993 resection liver, gall bladder, diaphragm metastasis; Feb-Jul 1993 active-specific-immune therapy; Jan 1995 resection liver and diaphragm | Apr 1995 | No evidence of cancer, CEA 2.1 | Alive and well Sep 1999 | No evidence of disease at first visit |
| Colon 4, mucinous signet ring adenocarcinoma, pT4pN3MxR1 | 49/M | 1993 | Sep 1993 | Hemicolectomy, Oct 1993-May 1994 5FU/ergamisol | May 1994 | No evidence of cancer | Alive and well Sep 1999 | No evidence of disease at first visit |
| Ewing's sarcoma 1, right ischium and pubic bone | 18/M | 1988 | Jun 1988 | Right pelvic resection and arthroplasty; Jul 1988-Apr 1999 CESS-86-system chemotherapy; Aug 1995 wedge resection lung metastases; patient refused radiation therapy and chemotherapy | Sep 1995 | No evidence of cancer | Alive and well Sep 1999 | No evidence of disease at first visit |
| Alveolar soft tissue sarcoma 2, thigh | 17/F | 1992 | Apr 1992 | Tumor resection right thigh, Aug 1992 resection left lung, Mar 1993 resection right lung, Jul-Nov 1992 chemotherapy epirubicin/vinristine/ifosphamide | Jun 1993 | Status postsurgery, chemotherapy | No further recurrences, alive and well Aug 1998 | No evidence of disease at first visit |
| Melanoma 3, SQ tumor left leg, unknown primary tumor | 42/F | 1984 | Jul 1984 | Resection SQ tumor left leg, Sep 1984 reexision and Jan 1985 exploratory laparoscopy benign, Jan 1985 Mellant hyperthermal perfusion leg, Feb 1985 resection local recurrence, Feb 1986 excision large left inguinal lymph node metastasis | Apr 1986 | Status postresection | No further recurrences, alive and well Feb 1999 | No evidence of disease at first visit |
| Stomach 1, signet ring/Krukenberg | 54/F | 1996 | Dec 1996 | Radiation therapy to rectal, pelvic metastases | May 1997 | Gastric tumor, peritoneal carcinomatosis | Clinical improvement, then progression, expired Sep 2000 | No PR |

RT = radiation therapy; CT = computed tomography; TAHBSO = total abdominal hysterectomy and bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy; SQ = subcutaneous; PR = partial response.
and to identify all the CRs and PRs. To assess survival as an outcome, we would need a comparison cohort of patients similar in cancer organ/site, age, stage, gender, date of diagnosis, and status of disease at the time the treatment group came to Hufeland but receiving only conventional treatment. A prospective study that purported to have such a comparison group collected data on the CAM cohort via interview and chart abstraction but used only chart review of the comparison group and was therefore seriously biased. 

Appropriate comparison groups for prospective studies are hard to find. Most patients who present at an inpatient CAM clinic do so because they have reason to doubt that conventional treatment will cure them. Even matching on stage might not level the playing field unless additional markers and/or perceived risk of an adverse outcome are taken into account.

Clinics such as Hufeland clearly seek to provide comfort and hope to patients with advanced disease who are not ready for exclusively palliative care. The more established clinics do not guarantee to cure cancer; they offer, as Hufeland does, support for the immune system, spa services, and psychosocial programs in a setting of natural beauty, with an attentive staff and well-prepared meals. Although the treatment is not as gentle (eg, daily injections, enemas, and fever therapy) as is widely assumed, clinics such as Hufeland appear to offer something of value to cancer patients who have reached the end of the line in conventional medicine.

Conclusions

Our best-case series review indicates that a handful of patients, treated at this facility and not expected to do well, experienced tumor regression. That kind of observation is all that the method can support. However, a new conventional treatment that achieved 3 CRs and 2 PRs in a similar series of 12 cases might well be described as a candidate for further study. We believe that that kind of reasoning was the basis for the recommendations of the RAND best-case series reviewers. 

From that perspective, a phase II or prospective study of Hufeland patients with specific advanced cancers, such as melanomas or gliomas, seems worth proposing.

The RAND reviews and ours have highlighted the need for explicit criteria for the evaluation of both retrospective best-case series and prospective single-arm studies. As they do in phase II studies, investigators might select a priori a number or proportion of CRs and PRs (or other outcomes) required to justify further research. In reporting their results, they would describe this determination and the factors they took into consideration. Patients with advanced cancer who use CAM are a heterogeneous group, and the claims made for treatments vary. Taking those and other relevant factors into account will not be easy, but the difficulty should not deter us from trying to standardize the preliminary evaluation of complex CAM treatments alleged to benefit cancer patients.

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance we received from Wendy J. Verret, who served as project coordinator in the first year of the study, and from Martha Quezado, MD, who provided a second opinion for the pathology review of the brain cancers. Funding for this study was provided by the National Foundation for Alternative Medicine, 5 Thomas Circle, Washington, DC. The contents of the article are solely the responsibility of the authors. The detailed case reports required by the NCI guidelines are available on request.

References

1. Weiger WA, Smith M, Boon H, Richardson MA, Kapitchuk TJ, Eisenberg DM. Advising patients who seek complementary and alternative medical therapies for cancer. Ann Intern Med. 2002;137:889-903.
2. Richardson MA, Russell NC, Sanders T, Barrett R, Salveson C. Assessment of outcomes at alternative medicine cancer clinics: a feasibility study. J Altern Complement Med. 2001;7:19-32.
3. Nahin RL. Use of the best case series to evaluate complementary and alternative therapies for cancer: a systematic review. Semin Oncol. 2002;29:552-562.
4. National Cancer Institute. Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Available at: http://www3.cancer.gov/occam/bcs_preparation.html.
5. Hawkins MJ, Friedman MA. National Cancer Institute’s evaluation of unconventional cancer treatments. J Natl Cancer Inst. 1992;84:1699-1702.
6. Issels J. Cancer: A Second Opinion. Garden City, NY: Avery; 1999.
7. Cure Research Foundation. The Issels cancer treatment. Available at: http://www.cancure.org/issels_therapy.htm.
8. Pichinger A. Matrix & Matrix Regulation: Basis for a Holistic Theory in Medicine. Portland, Ore: Haug International; 1991.
9. Hufeland Clinic for Holistic Immunotherapy Web site. Available at: http://www.hufeland-klinik.de/Englisch/hufeland_clinic.htm.
10. Percival SS. Use of echinacea in medicine. Biochem Pharmacol. 2000;60:155-158.
11. Vuckovic-Dekic L, Stanojevic-Bakic N, Rajner L, Dekic M, Pesic M. Immunomodulation in vitro: the predictive value of in vitro testing of lung cancer patients’ lymphocyte responsiveness to stimulation by Thymex L—a preliminary report. J Exp Clin Cancer Res. 1997;16:309-312.
12. Bocci V. Biological and clinical effects of ozone: has ozone therapy a future in medicine? Br J Radiol. 1999;56:270-279.
13. Raber-Durlacher JE, Epstein JB, Raber J, et al. Periodontal infection in cancer patients treated with high-dose chemotherapy. Support Care Cancer. 2002;10:466-473.
14. Vinues P, Miligi L, Crosgnani P, et al. Delayed infection, late tonsillecetomy or adenoidectomy and adult leukaemia: a case-control study. Br J Cancer. 2003;88:47-49.
15. Kelvinson R. Colonic hydrotherapy: a review of the available literature. Complement Ther Med. 1995;3:2771-2778.
16. Shampo MA, Kyle RA. Hydrotherapy (Kneippism). Mayo Clin Proc. 1987;62:929.
17. Hodgson H. Does reflexology impact on cancer patients’ quality of life? Nurs Stand. 2000;14(31):33-38.
18. Smith MC, Kemp J, Hemphill L, Vojir CP. Outcomes of therapeutic massage for hospitalized cancer patients. J Nurs Scholarsh. 2002;34:257-262.
19. Booth S, Kelly MJ, Cox NP, Adams L, Guz A. Does oxygen help dyspnea in patients with cancer? Am J Respir Crit Care Med. 1996;153:1515-1518.
20. Kleef R, Jonas WB, Knogler W, Stenzinger W. Fever, cancer incidence and spontaneous remissions. Neuroimmunomodulation. 2001;9(2):55-64.
21. Frizelle FA, Hobday KS, Batts KP, Nelson H. Adenosquamous and squamous carcinoma of the colon and upper rectum: a clinical and histopathologic study. Dis Colon Rectum. 2001;44:341-346.
22. Marchese MJ, Chang CH. Malignant astrocytic gliomas in children. Cancer. 1990;65:2771-2778.
23. Timmernann B, Kortmann RD, Kuhl J, et al. Role of radiotherapy in the treatment of supratentorial primitive neuroectodermal tumors in childhood: results of the prospective German brain tumor trials HIT 88/89 and 91. J Clin Oncol. 2002;20:842-849.
24. Coulter I, Hardy M, Shckelle P, et al. Best-case series for the use of immuno-augmentation therapy and naltrexone of the treatment of cancer. In: Evidence Report/Technology Assessment No. 78 (prepared by Southern California-RAND Evidence-Based Practice Center under contract no. 290-07-0001). Rockville, Md: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; 2003.
25. Bagenal FS, Easton DF, Harris E, Chilvers CE, McElvanon TJ. Survival of patients with breast cancer attending Bristol Cancer Help Centre. Lancet. 1990;336:606-610.