Talking with Cancer Patients

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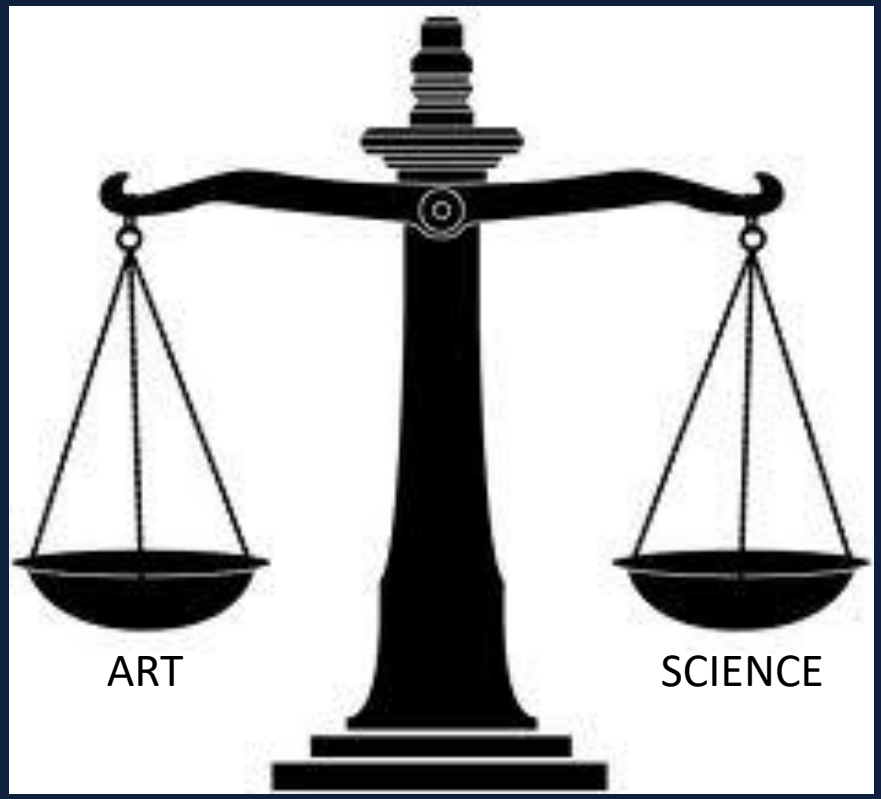
COMMUNICATING WITH CANCER PATIENTS

A Guide for Oncologists in Training

JOHN F SMYTH

ESMO press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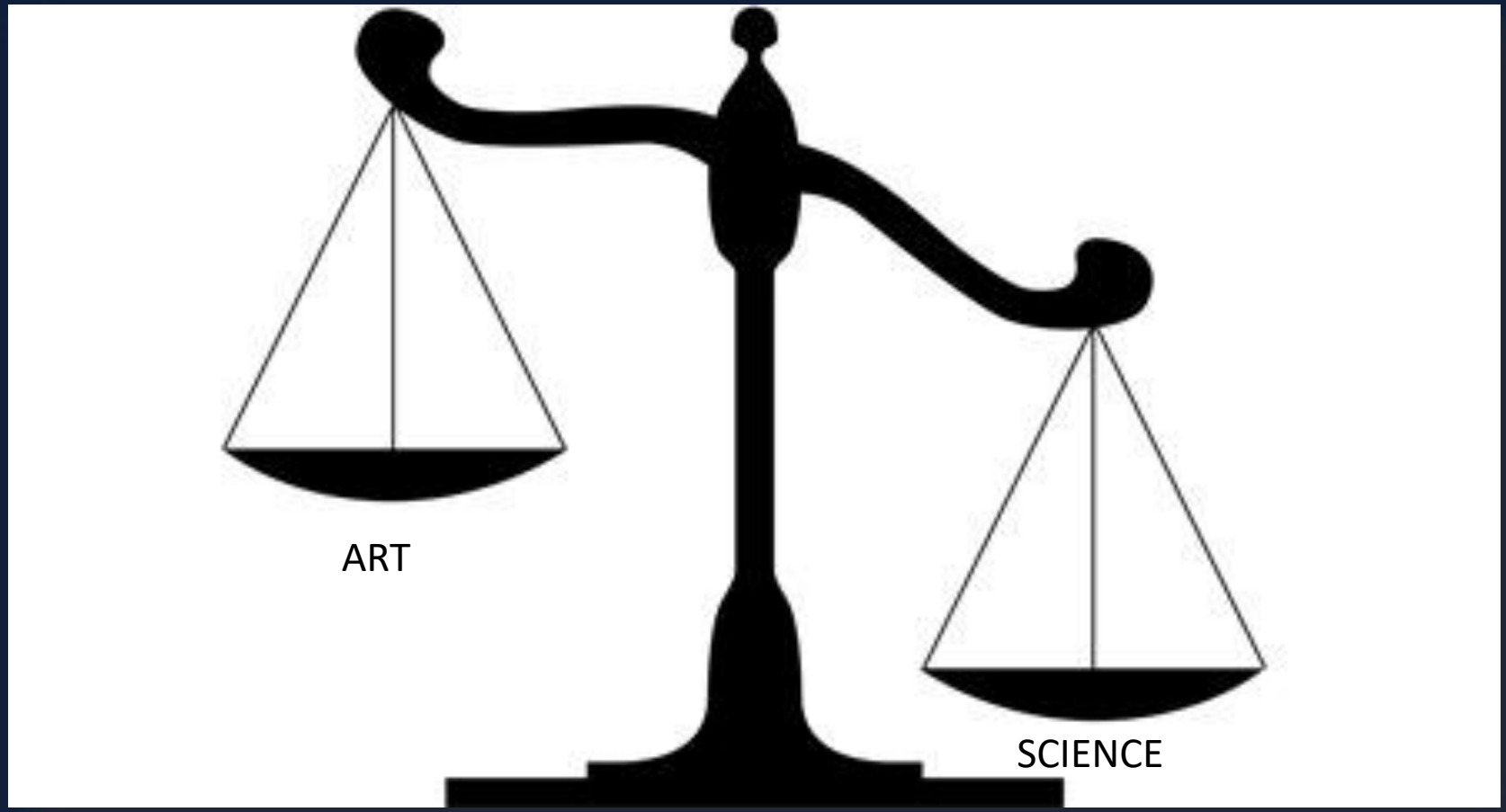
ART
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The importance of communication

The Problem

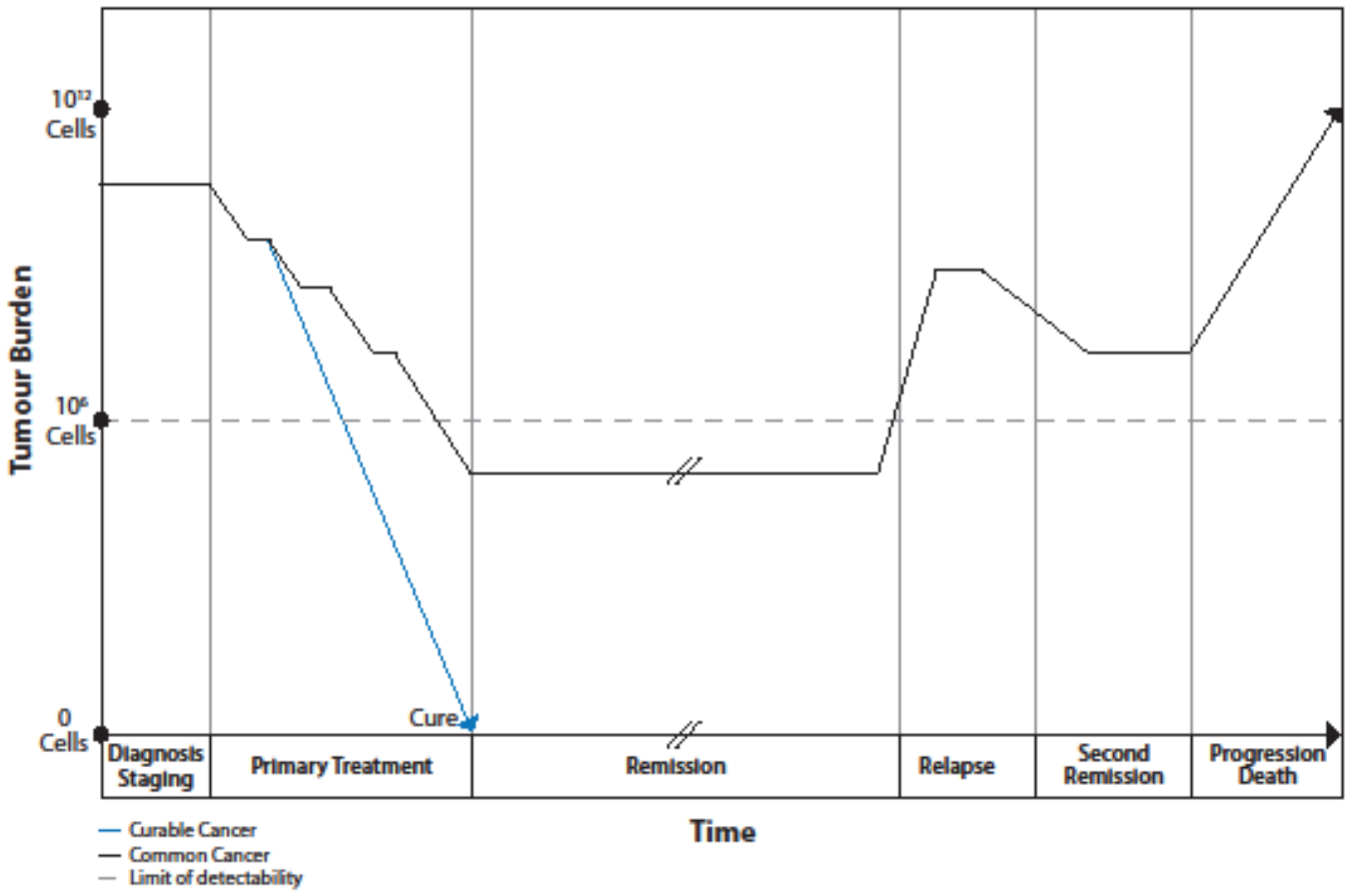
1. **Ever increasing scientific knowledge:**
   - Aetiology
   - Presentation
   - Management
   - Prognosis

2. **Ever increasing patients expectations and self acquired knowledge (web)**

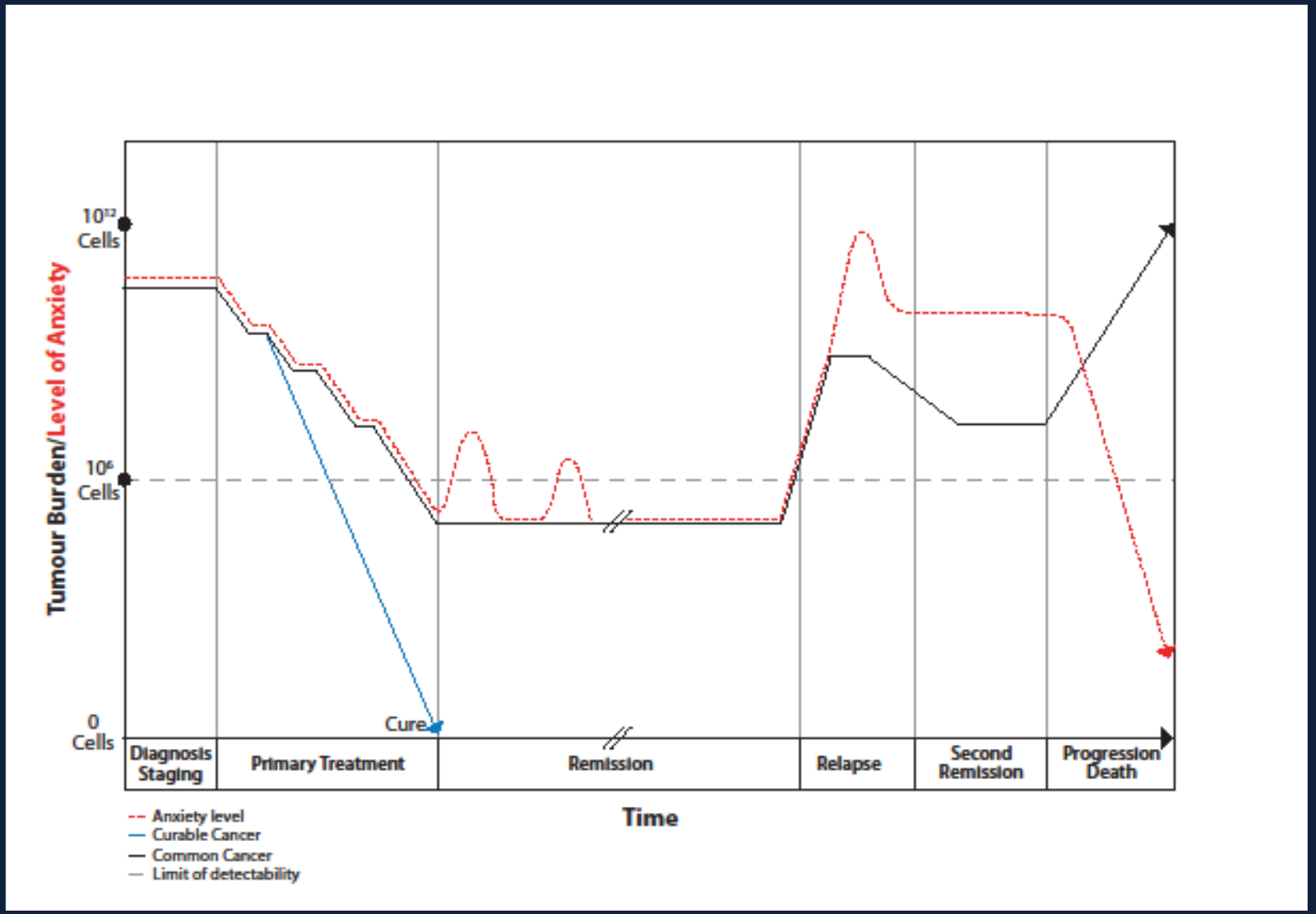
The Challenge - Communication

- So much information to explain
- Too little time to TALK and LISTEN

Tumour growth through different phases of disease management



Fluctuating levels of anxiety through different phases of disease management



Some Solutions

1. Plan consultation time
2. Share complex explanations with colleagues – especially nurses
3. Support conversations with hand-outs and appropriate websites
4. Monitor patients comprehension during and after treatment

New Patient Consultation

- Referral information
- Results of investigations to date
- History
- Examination
- Further investigations (staging)
- Possible treatments

Communication within the Context of Multidisciplinary Care

- Doctors
- Nurses
- Psychologists
- Patient Support Groups

Communicating About Follow-up

- Monitoring remission

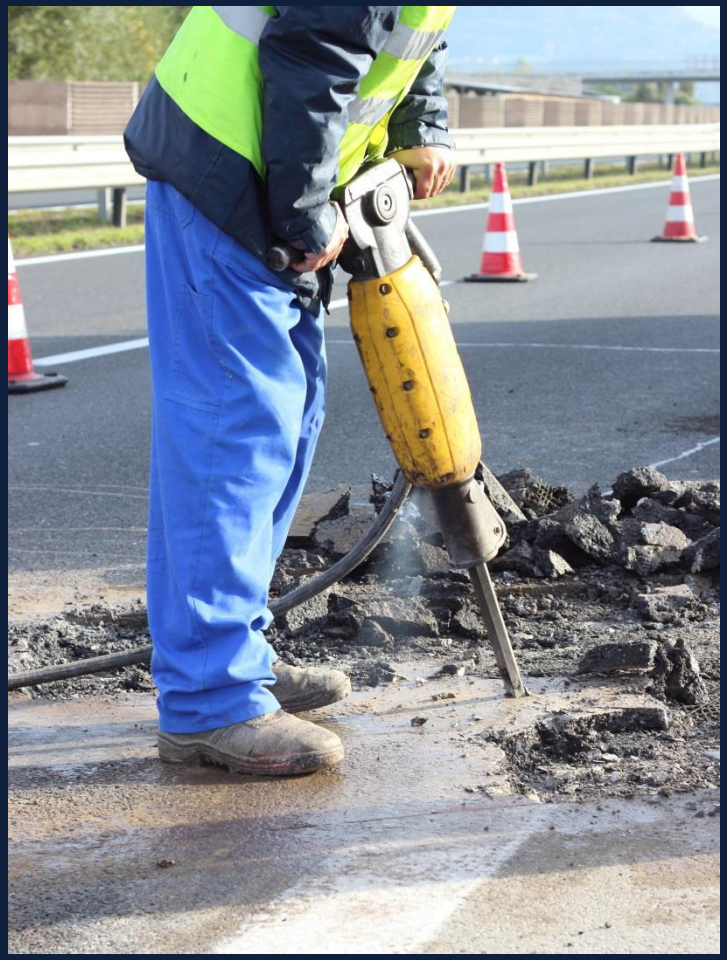
- Survivorship issues
  - Fear of relapse
  - Exercise/diet/sex/work
  - Children and Dependents

Progression and Terminal Care

- When to introduce colleagues from palliative care
- Explain different objectives of this “chapter” in their book
- LISTEN to and understand specific anxieties

Some Solutions

Choose an optimal environment for difficult conversations



Difficult Conversations

- Environment
- Tempo
- Language
- The importance of touch

Talking About Death

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969)

Communicating About Research

- Knowledge of what is best vv Uncertainty
- Benefits vv Risks
- “Informed” Consent
- Family Pressures

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

- Discuss
- LISTEN
- Learn – potentially harmful factors
- Value of Integrative Oncology

Bereavement

Timing - 6 weeks and 6 months

Place - Somewhere new

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