# Cancer misinformation surges as patients turn to unproven treatments with fatal consequences



Amidst a surge of misinformation regarding cancer treatments, patients are increasingly turning away from scientifically validated therapies in favour of unproven alternatives, such as coffee enemas and raw juice diets. This troubling trend has been highlighted by health professionals at the recent annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) in Chicago. Oncologists expressed grave concerns that the prevalence of misleading information could have dire consequences, including unnecessary deaths and the progression of malignancies.

Dr. Fumiko Chino, a researcher at the MD Anderson Cancer Centre in Texas, co-authored a study indicating that the volume of cancer-related misinformation has "acutely worsened" over the past decade. As cancer diagnoses continue to rise, particularly among an ageing global population, the proliferation of false information poses a significant public health threat. Despite a general trust in medical professionals, the study revealed that over half of respondents felt experts frequently contradicted one another, leading to a growing mistrust—in fact, one in twenty had no confidence in scientific sources regarding cancer information. “We’re losing the battle for communication. We need to regain that battlefield,” Chino remarked during the conference.

Dr. Julie Gralow, ASCO’s chief medical officer, shared her experiences with patients who sought all-natural treatment alternatives after consultations. She recounted instances where patients discovered clinics, particularly in Mexico, offering dubious therapies involving caffeine colonics and vitamin C infusions. Instead of reprimanding these patients, she opted for a supportive approach, allowing them to explore their preferences while gradually guiding them back to evidence-based treatments. Unfortunately, in several cases, some patients did not return, leading to tragic outcomes. "I would learn within nine months they tragically had died," Gralow stated, underscoring the gravity of the situation.

Retired breast surgeon Liz O’Riordan has witnessed the impact of misinformation firsthand. Following her own cancer diagnosis, she began sharing evidence-based information with her social media followers. She highlighted the overwhelming inquiries she receives, ranging from dietary concerns to queries about unconventional cures. “Every day I get messages from scared women who want to know if they need to stop eating dairy, soy, flaxseeds,” she said, emphasising the need for more doctors to engage with patients in online spaces. However, she acknowledged the challenges, noting that creating relevant content is time-consuming and that many medical professionals lack the audience needed to counteract misleading narratives effectively.

Dr. Richard Simcock from Macmillan Cancer Support echoed the deeply concerning rise in misinformation, stating that it has "exponentially increased the problem" of misconceptions surrounding cancer. He recounted the troubling cases of young women who chose radical diets and rejected standard medical treatments based on misleading online information. “It makes me very sad,” he lamented, pointing out that while patients have the right to refuse treatment, choices based on erroneous beliefs can lead to dire consequences.

Public health authorities also caution against reliance on anecdotal remedies promoted on social media. Prof. Stephen Powis, the national medical director of NHS England, highlighted the dual nature of social media as both a supportive community and a breeding ground for misinformation. He urged the public to approach claims of "miracle cures" with scepticism and recommended using credible sources, such as the NHS website, to verify health information.

As the digital landscape continues to evolve, the battle against cancer misinformation poses a significant challenge for health professionals. The urgent need for clear, accessible, and credible communication is paramount to ensure that patients are equipped with the information necessary to make informed decisions about their health.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/02/cancer-patients-misinformation-online-coffee-enemas-raw-juice-diets-), [[6]](https://acsjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/cncy.22909)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/02/cancer-patients-misinformation-online-coffee-enemas-raw-juice-diets-), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coffee_enema), [[6]](https://acsjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/cncy.22909)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/integrative-medicine/herbs/metabolic-therapies), [[3]](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/complementary-alternative-therapies/individual-therapies/gerson)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/02/cancer-patients-misinformation-online-coffee-enemas-raw-juice-diets-), [[5]](https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/integrative-medicine/herbs/gerson-regimen)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/02/cancer-patients-misinformation-online-coffee-enemas-raw-juice-diets-), [[6]](https://acsjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/cncy.22909)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/02/cancer-patients-misinformation-online-coffee-enemas-raw-juice-diets-), [[7]](https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/cam/patient/gerson-pdq)

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1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/02/cancer-patients-misinformation-online-coffee-enemas-raw-juice-diets-> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/integrative-medicine/herbs/metabolic-therapies> - Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center discusses metabolic therapies, including coffee enemas and raw juice diets, highlighting their lack of efficacy and potential dangers. The article emphasizes that such practices can lead to serious health issues like infections, electrolyte imbalances, and even death. It advises cancer patients to avoid these unproven treatments and rely on evidence-based medical care.
3. <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/complementary-alternative-therapies/individual-therapies/gerson> - Cancer Research UK provides an overview of Gerson therapy, which involves a strict organic vegetarian diet, nutritional supplements, and coffee enemas. The article states that there is no scientific evidence supporting its use as a cancer treatment and warns of severe side effects, including infections and nutritional deficiencies.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coffee_enema> - The Wikipedia page on coffee enemas explains the practice of injecting coffee into the rectum and colon. It notes that there is no scientific evidence supporting any health benefits of this practice and that medical authorities advise against it due to potential dangers such as infections, electrolyte imbalances, and death.
5. <https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/integrative-medicine/herbs/gerson-regimen> - Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center details the Gerson regimen, which includes a strict metabolic diet, coffee enemas, and various supplements. The article highlights the lack of evidence for its anticancer effects and warns of serious health risks associated with the therapy.
6. <https://acsjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/cncy.22909> - A study published in Cancer Cytopathology discusses the rise of cancer misinformation, including the promotion of unproven treatments like coffee enemas and raw juice diets. The research highlights the dangers of such misinformation and the need for effective communication to counteract false claims.
7. <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/cam/patient/gerson-pdq> - The National Cancer Institute provides information on Gerson therapy, noting that it has not been approved by the FDA for cancer treatment. The article discusses the lack of evidence supporting its efficacy and the potential risks associated with the therapy, including electrolyte imbalances and infections.