

Interview with Dr Etienne Callebout

by Ginny Fraser

Doctor of Integrative Medicine, Etienne Callebout, has been described as someone with “a brain the size of a small planet”, and his physical appearance – large, intense and untidy – certainly gives the impression of someone brilliant but not very concerned with the practicalities of life. Dr Callebout is one of four of the best-known “alternative” cancer specialists who appear in the listings in the back of cancer books (along with Julian Kenyon, Fritz Schellander and Patrick Kingsley).

Belgian by birth, he has lived in the UK for some time and practices from an office in Harley Street. He is a strong believer in using naturopathic medicine to complement orthodox treatment, and often cancer patients come to him when all other options have been exhausted. He is often a last resort, and because of that his regimes – combinations of diet, supplementation, detox practices, and intravenous medication - are known to be rigorous.

He trained as a medical doctor in Belgium, but due to serious illness at the age of 19 that was cured by naturopathic medicine, he became interested in finding out as much as possible about this field. This seems to be a key element of how Dr Callebout works. He is a seeker by nature, with an intense curiosity to learn as much as possible about the many different aspects of health creation and disease. During the two hours of our interview his conversation was littered with the names of well-known researchers and scientists like Prigogyne and Klinghardt as well as spiritual teachers such as Krishnamurti, Nisargadatta and Barry Long. His CV is impressive, with



qualifications in acupuncture; homeopathy; naturopathy; cranio-sacral therapy, and many more less mainstream approaches.

Following his qualification as a doctor, he specialised in emergency and tropical medicine, practicing in Bangladesh and Rancaï (in Bihar State), where he also took time to explore places of retreat and meditation and the spiritual element human existence.

A spell of long-distance commuting followed, with a period working in both Belgium and England during the 80s, including a time as a general practitioner in Belgium and study at London’s Royal Homeopathic Hospital. This was combined with working at the Letchworth Centre in Hertfordshire, a charity with a clinic attached, where he worked as a naturopathic doctor. Before moving to England full-time, he also co-founded Arnica – a team of 24-hour emergency doctors who did house calls in Brussels using acupuncture, homeopathy and

other naturopathic approaches, relying on this as much as possible rather than using drugs.

His move to the UK was to work full-time at the Letchworth Centre. And in 1989 his interest in cancer began in earnest, when his father died of pancreatic cancer – from diagnosis to death in six weeks. This was a great shock, and spurred him into seeking out the most up-to-date information on alternative approaches to cancer. Funding himself, he travelled to the US and Canada, checking out as many practitioners and naturopathic remedy manufacturers as possible. “It is very important to me to be independent,” he said. “The nutritional companies are no different from the pharmaceutical companies in that it is human nature to want to push their products. I wanted to check each product out myself, so that I could make the best independent choices for my patients, and change without hesitation if a better product came on the market.”

“In those days, in the early nineties, this kind of medicine was quite underground, it was easier to access these people and my tactic was basically to share whatever information I had with them, which would encourage them to be very open with me. The more I travelled, the more this great exchange of information began to take place. I acquired a sense of experience and knowledge that would be difficult to get any other way. I met everyone – naturopathic doctors specialising in cancer across the US including people like Jimmy Chan, Jessestoff and others. And also the people who developed metabolic typing, Harold Crystal and William Wolcott (whose books I contributed to).”

His quest for information also took him to Germany and Switzerland, which is well known for its specialist cancer clinics. He visited many of them.

Callebout is an unusual combination of the fiercely scientific and the psycho-spiritual. Trained in Psychosynthesis, he considers the philosophy of healing as deeply as the biochemistry. “I am challenging myself and the dogma that physical healing should be pursued no matter what. None of us knows what is for the highest good, so in that context I just do what I do to the best of my ability.”

“The question is: How can we have a more integrative kind of therapy that brings together the emotional and the physical? It is a challenge. With cancer you have to be so focused on the biochemistry, you almost need three brains to cope with what we know and to keep abreast of it all. There is a danger of becoming so busy with the body that we lose track of the emotional side of things, for instance, what people really want.”

In his practice he has learnt that the patient’s own attitude to their healing is crucial. “Often people’s relatives ring up on their behalf, desperate to get help for their loved one. Yet if the patient is not fully participating in their treatment and their recovery, I have learnt from experience it just doesn’t work. There is a certain kind of determination that is required.”

“I really only want to see people who know that I know a lot, but that I do not have the whole truth, and who also really want to help themselves in an active way. These are people who want to have an active participation in their healing and make choices. They want to be informed and are happy to challenge, not for the sake of challenging, but because they want to understand something. I also have a service that I offer for free, whereby people can call me and I will talk to them for ten minutes. If they want to take it further then they can make an appointment to come and see me.”

“Nobody has the full truth about cancer, but basically what I do is try to make the body cancer-unfriendly at the same time as attacking the cancer directly. I look at all the elements that enhance cancer, and through a whole range of blood and urine tests try to check out what it is in the body that we should correct and what we should leave be. It is important that we should not annoy the person with too many elements, which is something I have done in the past.”

There is no static “Callebout” programme – it all depends on the results of the blood tests, which give information not touched upon in regular hospital blood tests. Data can be gleaned about aspects such as cell-mediated immunity; NK cells; status of the immune system and T-lymphocytes. Also revealed is

whether the cancer has the ability to attract blood vessels to itself through the process of angiogenesis; whether it is secreting enzymes that eat away the immediate environment (MMP2); the capacity for apoptosis (ability of a cell to commit suicide, something cancer cells do not do naturally); gene mutation; non-genomic RNA and DNA – what is in the bloodstream that is not you – such as the fungal, bacterial and viral load.

“Not that these are necessarily carcinogenic,” says Callebout, “But they keep the body busy, so it cannot deal so well with the cancer.” The presence of heavy metals can also be identified. “According to English law you can’t store mercury anywhere in your house, but you can store it in your mouth!” According to Dr Callebout, “There are 5-6,000 papers claiming that mercury is bad for the human system, and around 10 that say it is good! And they are based on two papers which say it is OK because “we have always done it so”.”

“Of great importance, too, are xeno-oestrogens, which have increased enormously in the last twenty years due to a combination of pesticides and pollution. These oestrogen mimicking substances can be analysed in the tissues and blood.”

The way Dr Callebout works is that he combines the results of these in-depth tests with his vast experience of other experts in the field of cancer treatment. For example, he is a great admirer of the work of Max Gerson, founder of the well-known Gerson Therapy. Gerson was a pioneer of the work on sodium-potassium exchange and also introduced the use of the coffee enema as a vital aid to detoxification. “Gerson did excellent, innovative work, but it cannot be used the way he designed it.” claims Callebout. “The soil is so depleted now that the vegetables simply do not have the nutritional content they had when he was working half a century ago. We also have to adapt de-toxification methods to the climate. It is nice to have juices in California but can you do it in Aberdeen? You also have to take into account what people are *willing* to do. I am very enthusiastic about a soy-based product grown wild in Mongolia in specially enriched soil. But people just wouldn’t take it because it

tasted so bad! So I quite often had to back off on that one!”

Another area that he has subjected to in-depth scrutiny is the whole area of alkalinity-acidity – a hot topic in naturopathic cancer treatment. The conventional wisdom is that if you have cancer, then you need to keep your body alkaline. (People with cancer usually have a very acid pH). However, important work done on metabolic typing (pioneered by Drs Kelley and Gonzales in the US) shows that, based on blood tests, some people acidified with vegetables and alkalisied with meat – quite the opposite of the expected reaction. Cancer cells can be killed by over-alkalising and also by over-acidification (which happens during hyperthermia).

“It seems that there is a general rule that patients with the not-solid cancers like the lymphomas, leukemias, melanomas and sarcomas do well on a high-protein, high-fat low-carbohydrate diet of a particular nature and ideally organic. All the solid cancers like breast, colon and prostate conform to the idea that a vegan diet is generally best. “

“Blanket rules are not what I do”, he explained, “The more I look the more I see there are no rules! The more I know, the more I realise I still don’t know. But it is a knowledgeable “I don’t know!” His attitude makes a refreshing change from the commonly-experience stance of “the doctor knows best”.

“What I would say that with whatever diet is chosen, it has to be as close as possible to nature – fruitcakes do not grow on trees, and processed food takes too much effort to process. There is also a burden on the system with very cold food straight from the fridge. For some people a macrobiotic diet works very well. Then again for someone with well-advanced cancer who cannot digest food very well, raw foods (which are high in nutrients) would be too difficult for them, but cooked macrobiotic food would be good.”

Dr Callebout’s philosophy is simple. “Look at what went wrong, try to correct it and give an extra little push to the body. If you only aim for homeostasis then you might not get the

desired effect.” He quotes the work of Nobel Prize winner, Dr Prigogyne, of the Free University of Brussels, who did extensive work on this subject, who said that in order to create negative entropy ie evolution to a higher state, you first had to create an unstable situation in the body. “Thus, it is possible to over-acidify, over-alkalise or over-oxygenate to create a positive result.”

His treatments are often tailored to work in conjunction with other therapies such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy, and he also offers supplements to limit the side-effects of these treatments, plus guidance on which supplements to *avoid* in case they protect the cancer cells. He is increasingly working in co-operation with the medical establishment and often gets referrals through oncologists in mainstream medicine.

Although Dr Callebout is now a well-know alternative cancer specialist, he continues to pursue his quest for knowledge on this disease

with, for instance, quarterly trips to the conferences of the American Association of Environmental Medicine. The importance of being willing to let go of one approach and adapt and change as new information comes forward is paramount for him. He translates the old adage of “Don’t live your life according to others’ opinions” to “Don’t live your life according to your own opinions, because they might be inaccurate, based on out of date information and beliefs and mainly on survival instincts.”

If you are looking for a doctor with a fantastic filing system, a team of secretaries who immediately return your calls, who provides neat word-processed prescriptions, then Dr Callebout is not your man. On the other hand, if you are looking for someone with enormous eclectic experience who will treat you as an individual and not a “cancer patient”, this unconventional Belgian might be just the ticket.