

This is the fourteenth newsletter in a series of ONCORG Community Conversations. They're focused on relationships between doctors and patients, and the complexity of treating cancer.

August 2026 – Cancer is like a Weed.



Rodney Thomas is a senior officer working for ONCORG, INC, headquartered in Mt. Laurel, NJ. ONCORG was developed as a comprehensive cancer support service for those seeking a first or second opinion for their cancer.

Mr. Thomas is a military veteran who served eight years in the USAF. He also spent eleven years in the automotive industry, ten years in healthcare and eight years with Apple Inc. supporting customer needs.

Cancer is like a Weed

The more I learn about cancer, the more I can appreciate how complicated it is. Cancer has a strong propensity to live, much like a weed in your garden. Highly respected oncology health systems like Memorial Sloan Kettering and MD Anderson use the analogy of comparing cancer to weeds in a garden or on your lawns. They're a pain to eradicate, they take over the lawns and gardens, and you have to continuously 'work' the field. Cancer is an unwanted weed.

According to MD Anderson, Oncologists are like 'weed-pullers' who try to remove the growth and its roots. Chemotherapy is compared to a weed killer sprayed over the garden. And Radiation is like a focused magnifying glass, directing energy to destroy a specific growth.

Targeted therapy has been compared to a specialized weed killer that targets specific traits of the weeds without harming surrounding grass and desired growth.

And according to Sloan Kettering, weeds and cancer are 'out of control' aggressive growth that disrupts a healthy biological ecosystem. In my previous articles, I talked about 'what lies beneath.' Let's shift a bit and talk about how tumors interact with the human body.

Cancer needs a hospitable environment to thrive, much like a weed seed needs fertile ground. Just like a healthy cell, cancer needs a hospitable environment, requiring blood vessels and growth signal that allow the 'weed' to take root.

Cancer cells and weeds share several core biological characteristics.

- They multiply past normal cellular limits.
- Because they steal food resources like water, sunlight and nutrients, they hijack blood supplies and oxygen.

- Weeds and Cancer cells choke out adjacent vegetation destroying neighboring healthy tissues.
- Weeds and seeds travel to grow in other locations. In the body cancer cells travel via blood and the lymph nodes spreading the disease, otherwise known as metastasis..
- Weeds thrive in poor conditions even if exposed to weedkiller chemicals. Cancer can mutate to survive chemotherapy and radiation.

I am especially encouraged by the powerful strides made by medicine. Historically, cancer treatment focused entirely on killing the tumor, similar to pulling a weed out by its stalk. Modern medicine using immunotherapy and targeted therapies, has shifted from pulling the weed to altering the environment, making the body's internal environment unsuitable for cancer growth.

In closing, cancer treatments have improved during the past 30 years, death rates have been reduced, and survivorship for millions have improved after diagnosis. Early detection and better screening tests find cancer before the weed can spread, making it much easier to treat. I'm a living example.

This is Commander Rodney Thomas, signing off for today. Be safe out there.

Rodney Thomas

Rodney Thomas
ONCORG – Chief Communication Officer