A VICTORIAN psychiatrist has accused Ian Gawler's foundation of denigrating conventional cancer treatments and encouraging people to use harsh and unjustified lifestyle changes to combat cancer.

After attending several Gawler Foundation programs last year, Dr Tanya Hall said she was troubled by the strict diet and excessive juicing regime taught to cancer patients and was surprised to hear a program leader say there was no evidence to show chemotherapy was effective.

The full Medical Journal of Australia article

"This was nothing less than astonishing, patently untrue, and highly disrespectful to those of us undergoing chemotherapy," she wrote of her experience in the Medical Journal of Australia.

"In fact, while criticism of conventional medicine is noticeable, there is an almost complete lack of critical analysis among participants of Gawler's methods - which are supported in a quasi-religious fashion."
The Gawler Foundation's response

Dr Hall said although the program gave her a sense of autonomy during her illness and taught her useful meditation, the low-fat, essentially vegan diet with no added salt, sugar or caffeine lacked a solid evidence base and was particularly harsh for people suffering mouth ulcers and nausea. When combined with juicing vegetables six times a day and meditation, it became "extremely time consuming".

"Where was the space for family, friends, music or reading?" she wrote.

Dr Hall also questioned the idea espoused by Dr Gawler that those with "passively subservient" and "nice" personalities were more likely to get cancer, saying without any evidence to support it, it was "cruel and unjustified" to suggest people's personalities were faulty and needed to change.

Dr Hall's experience flies in the face of the Gawler Foundation's claim that it does not discourage conventional medicine.

For the last 29 years, tens of thousands of people have attended the foundation's "healing" programs which are based on the teachings of Dr Ian Gawler (pictured) - a former veterinarian who says alternative therapies helped him beat incurable cancer. He is the author of You Can Conquer Cancer, a best-selling book which the foundation's chief executive Karin Knoester says informs the foundation's programs.

Ms Knoester said she thought Dr Hall's experience was unique because the majority of participants did not feel guilt-ridden or blamed for their disease, as Dr Hall suggested. Ms Knoester said she did not know which program leader had criticised chemotherapy during Dr Hall's participation, but said it was not the foundation's view.

"We have a number of therapists who teach at our centres … and they are all being reminded of the position we take," she said.

Ms Knoester said although no independent evaluations had shown the Gawler programs were an effective cancer treatment, there was evidence that nutrition, exercise, meditation and positive thinking could all on their own help people overcome illness.

Deputy Head of Oncology at Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Associate Professor Michael Jefford, said he got the impression from patients that the Gawler Foundation's staff were "overvaluing" their therapies while telling people conventional treatments were less effective and more toxic than they really are.

"There is very good evidence for the efficacy of chemotherapy … so to say it doesn't work is blatantly wrong," he said.

"There is also good evidence that chemotherapy improves quality of life … so to say it's toxic is incorrect."
The full article in the Medical Journal of Australia.

Read more: http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/doctor-denounces-gawler-programs-harsh-healing-20120608-201qp.html#ixzz1xKZQ3we4