

Birmingham professor talks about the language of cancer

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A University of Birmingham professor tackles a different aspect of cancer today, as he features in a BBC World Service documentary about the language used to describe the disease.

Professor Michael Overduin (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/cancer/overduin-michael.aspx>) is one of the interviewees in the **Rhetoric of Cancer** (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p011f8vh/broadcasts/upcoming>), which looks at the rise of war and battle metaphors to describe cancer.

The programme looks at how phrases such as 'battling cancer' and 'the war against cancer' were coined by Richard Nixon shortly after the Vietnam War and slipped into common parlance. It goes on to explore how not all cancer patients find this metaphor helpful or realistic.

Professor Overduin, Professor of Structural Biology within the School of Cancer Sciences of the University of Birmingham, talks about how visualising cancer as an 'enemy' can be an easy image to grasp, but, through his research at the University of Birmingham, he sees his work of more of a puzzle, understanding how different pieces of a jigsaw fit together.

He also refers to how scientists see the process of cancer cells more as a series of switches, and seek the knowledge to turn these switches on and off depending on what the cells are doing and how they respond to one another.

A commentary accompanying the programme can be read on the **BBC website** (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-24985184>).