

The Dancing Doctor by Awakin Call Editors

On a chilly morning in November, 2013, Deborah Cohan, MD, a clinical professor and program director at the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine, walked into an operating suite, her curly hair tucked under a cap, not to perform surgery but to undergo a double mastectomy for breast cancer. Within minutes, the sterile room began to enliven with R&B drumbeats, and the entire surgical team erupted into dance to Beyoncé's "Get Me Bodied," with Cohan in the center of it all.

This flash mob video, captured by the anesthesiologist, went viral — with over eight million views to date — and even Beyoncé herself posted it on her Facebook page. "What better time to celebrate life," said Cohan, "than when you're facing death?" To be clear, for Cohan, dancing wasn't about glossing over suffering with a forced smile, but about leaning into the body, literally dancing with fear and grief. Dancing was her way to optimize her body before surgery, to connect with the surgical team, and to embrace friends and family dancing virtually in solidarity with her.

As an obstetrician-gynecologist who has performed thousands of ultrasounds and witnessed babies dancing in their mothers' wombs, Cohan imagines that she, too, was dancing long before she was born. When she was three, she began learning highly choreographed methods like ballet and jazz. Then in 2011, she happened upon Dance Journey, a conscious practice where people danced freely, effortlessly, and, as she observed, ecstatically; these movements opened up in her a deep listening to her body and an awareness of the healing power within. It was in this spirit that she danced in the surgical suite. And in 2014, a year after her surgery, Cohan founded Foundation for Embodied Medicine (FEM), a nonprofit organization to bring this embodied wisdom to patients, caregivers, and healthcare professionals.

A Harvard-trained physician, Cohan is an obstetrician who attends births at Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and serves as the medical director of HIVE, caring for pregnant people living with HIV and promoting reproductive and sexual wellness for those living with and affected by HIV. Since 2005, there have been no babies born with HIV in San Francisco.

In addition to her medical degree, Cohan holds a masters in public health from the University of California at Berkeley, and a fellowship in reproductive infectious diseases at San Francisco General Hospital. She also served as a member of the Department of Health and Human Services Panel on Antiretroviral Guidelines for Adults and Adolescents.

For Cohan, medicine and movement are deeply interwoven. She has studied with Anna Halprin of Life/Art Process, Tina Stromsted of Authentic Movement, and Valerie Chafograck of Dance Sanctuary and Movement Liberation. With an embodied approach

that honors the inherent wisdom of our bodies and nature, she has served as a doula for those who are giving birth and those who are dying.

The flash mob video landed Cohan interviews on multiple mainstream media outlets, including Good Morning America and the Ellen DeGeneres Show, and inspired others to dance before their surgeries. She lives in Berkeley, California, with her two children and their dog. In her free time, she can be found causing mischief, singing to her plants, and spreading messages of love, joy, and interconnectedness.

Join an Awakin Call on September 11th, 2021 with this compassionate physician and expressive dancer in a call that will be part-conversation, part-workshop, with an invitation to explore body awareness, conscious movement, and embodied presence in a collective field. RSVP info [here](#).