



Oncology Informational Handout

The patient-doctor relationship is an essential component of effective health care. To develop and maintain a good patient-doctor relationship, it is important for the patient to feel comfortable enough to ask questions and important for the doctor to answer questions and address and concerns thoroughly.

If possible, have a family member or friend present at all doctor appointments so they can help you remember what the doctor said. If you do not understand anything that your doctor has said, ask him/her to explain it in terms that you can understand. Take notes and write down all instructions in detail. It may also be helpful to bring a list of day-to-day concerns with you to your appointments so the doctor can address them.

Some cancer patients want to know all the medical details of their illness, and others prefer only to be given a basic overview. Speak with your doctor to control the amount of information you receive.

Cancer treatment often involves an oncology team, which may include the following:

- Doctor/oncologist
- Oncology nurse
- Office staff
- Social worker (psychologist, pastoral counselor, sex therapist)
- Patient advocate
- Case manager
- Pharmacist

It is a good idea to choose one doctor from your oncology team to be your main information source. Good communication with each member of your team can help ensure that your needs are met.

General Information to Share with Your Oncology Team

Answering the following questions will provide important information to your oncologist before you begin cancer treatment:

Has a close relative (e.g., mother, father, sister, brother, grandparent) been diagnosed with cancer? What type(s)?

Does your occupation require physical exertion or mental stress? How much?

How much are you affected by family problems, financial problems, or other types of stress?

What are your interests and hobbies?

What do you already know about the type of cancer you have?

What are your goals during and following treatment (e.g., to continue hobbies, to have children)?

Basic Questions to Ask Your Oncologist/Oncology Team

Answers to the following questions may be helpful before beginning cancer treatment:

What is my diagnosis?

Are additional tests or procedures required to confirm my diagnosis?

Will the results of my diagnostic tests be sent to another pathology laboratory for a second opinion?

What is the stage of my cancer?

What is my prognosis without treatment?

What treatment do you recommend?

What percentage of patients responds to this treatment?

What is the goal of the recommended treatment (e.g., cure, prolonged survival, relief of symptoms)?

Do you have a financial interest in the recommended treatment? For example, are you receiving payment from the pharmaceutical company that produces the prescribed medications?

Are the prescribed drugs approved by the FDA to treat my specific type of cancer?

Are additional treatments available?

What are the benefits and risks of these other treatments?

How should I expect to feel during treatment? What are the side effects of treatment?

How will treatment affect my ability to work or care for my family?

During Treatment

During cancer treatment, don't delay asking important questions. If you require an extended amount of your doctor's time, notify him/her in advance whenever possible. Try to avoid asking important questions under stress – make sure you have time to consider the doctor's response, ask follow-up questions, and make careful decisions.

Ask effective questions rather than leading questions. For example, ask, "How many of these procedures have you performed in the last year?" instead of, "You have performed a lot of these procedures, right?"

It is important to discuss the impact of cancer and treatment on your life. Ask your doctor about side effects (e.g., nausea, headache, fatigue, depression) and changes in body function (e.g., sleep, eating habits, sexual function). Take day-to-day notes so you can report these changes to your doctor accurately.