

A Cancer Diagnosis

After a cancer diagnosis, patients and their families have many decisions to make in a short time. Where do I go for treatment? What costs will be covered by insurance? What about travel expenses? As a cancer patient, you are urged to take an active role in your care, and make treatment decisions that are best for you and your loved ones.

Consider the Following Issues Before Choosing a Treatment

Get A Second Opinion

If you have been diagnosed with cancer by your primary care physician, it is wise to get a second opinion from a cancer specialist. In fact, many health insurance plans require a second opinion before covering some treatment costs. If the specialist agrees with the first diagnosis, they can let you know the available treatment options for your cancer.

Prognosis

A prognosis is a cancer specialist's best estimate of how your disease will respond to treatment, and what your life expectancy may be. Some patients whose cancer is discovered in the early stages may only need minor treatment. Others with advanced cancer may have few treatment options, if any, or may have an aggressive cancer with a low survival rate.

Patients who receive the worst news may proceed with treatment anyway; others may refuse treatment. Whatever decision you make, consider the wishes of loved ones, and talk it over with your cancer care team.

Cost and Insurance Coverage

Because cancer treatment involves sophisticated techniques, machinery and medicine, it can be very expensive. Some treatments require a hospital stay of one night or more, which adds on to the overall cost. Health insurance and managed care plans rarely cover all the costs of cancer treatment, so it's important to find out what is and is not covered by your policy. Uncovered expenses are the patient's responsibility.

Travel

If you have to travel to be treated, you might need to bring someone with you for an extended stay. Travel and lodging costs can add up quickly, and must be considered along with treatment expenses.

Advance Care Planning

It is important to have a clear understanding of your cancer diagnosis and treatment goals. Advance care planning allows you to identify your preferences for care and how they should be

handled if you become unable to do so. It helps to discuss this information with your family and healthcare team and complete the necessary advance directives before treatment begins.

Advance directives include the Medical Power of Attorney, Living Will and Out of Hospital Do-Not-Resuscitate orders.

Clinical Trials

Some newly-diagnosed patients may be eligible to join a clinical trial. These carefully controlled studies test new drugs or treatments that may be as good or better than standard care. Clinical trials have provided new hope for some people whose cancer has not responded to traditional treatments.

Moving Forward

If you decide to proceed with cancer treatment, then it's time to choose an oncologist (cancer doctor) and a hospital where the treatment will be carried out.

Questions to Ask The Doctors/Specialist

Some patients are anxious if they don't have enough information. Other people get stressed or feel overwhelmed by too much information.

No matter which type of cancer patient you are, asking your health care team the right questions about your disease and cancer treatment can play an important part in managing your care.

Just be sure to think about what you'd like to know right now, and tell your doctor if you would like a little information or a lot.

Cancer Diagnosis

What type of cancer do I have?

What is my exact diagnosis?

What size is the tumor?

Is it operable?

Where is the cancer located?

Has it spread?

What is my prognosis?

Cancer Stages

What's the stage of my cancer?

What does this stage mean for my cancer treatment and prognosis?

Cancer Treatment

What are my treatment options?
Which treatment do you recommend and why?
What's the goal of my treatment?
What side effects does this treatment have?
How often will I have treatments?
How long will they last?
How should I prepare for treatment?
What are your realistic goals for my treatment?
What are the chances that I can be cured?
What are my chances of a long-term response with good quality of life?
Are there different approaches to treating my kind of cancer?
What will happen if I refuse treatment?
Can I continue to take my daily medication regimens or vitamins
What can I eat or will I be able to eat?

Cancer Research and Clinical Trials

What are clinical trials?
Are clinical trials an option for me?
How can I learn more?

Cancer Treatment Side Effects

What are possible risks and side effects?
What should I do to manage them?
Will treatment make me infertile?
If so, is there anything I can do to try to preserve my fertility?
Whom should I call with questions?
What about if it's after hours or an emergency?
How will treatment affect my daily life?
Will there be long term side effects?
Can I still work?
When can I return to work?
Can I still exercise?
Can I take care of my children and family?
What can I do to stay as healthy as possible before, during and after treatment?
Can I travel?
Can I travel on an airplane?
Can I drink wine, beer or alcohol?

Support

What support services are available for my family and me?

Can you refer me to support services?

Who do I contact if I have questions after I leave your office?

Will you give me a written electronic plan that summarizes our discussion, my treatment choices and advice for managing treatment and side effects?

Are there programs that will help cover the cost of Dr. Visits and surgery?

Financial

Who handles health insurance concerns in your office?

I'm worried about paying for my treatment. Who can help me?

What does my insurance cover?

How much do I have to pay out of pocket?

Do you have installment plans?

Do I have to pay upfront?

Learning More

Can you please explain my pathology report to me?

To avoid confusion, what terms should I use when looking up information about my disease?

What resources do you suggest to help me learn more? ·

Are other members of my family at risk?

My Employer

Do You have a leave program that I can take an undetermined time off of work and return at a later date?

Does my insurance cover other costs, such as mental care, physical therapy or self care such as massages?

Communication With Your Doctor

Write down your questions before your appointment.

Prioritize the list and ask your most important questions first.

Bring a notebook or recorder. Or use a recording app on your smartphone.

Take a friend or family member to your appointment to help ask questions or write down information.

Tell your doctor if you don't understand something. Medical vocabulary and concepts can be challenging.

Please feel free to contact My Basket of Hope if you have any concerns, needs or additional questions.