

## **When you have cancer...asking questions is important**

### **Questions to ask a medical or radiation oncologist**

When you see a medical or radiation oncologist today you may have questions and concerns. Often these are forgotten in the heat of the moment, only to be remembered later. We have compiled a list of questions to help you get the information you want about your illness and possible treatments.

You and your family can use this pamphlet to help you decide what you need to ask your oncologist each time you have an appointment.

Tick the questions that you want to ask or write down any that are not listed. Your oncologist is keen to answer any questions you may have, either now or at future consultations. If your questions have already been answered, then this pamphlet can serve as a checklist. Remember you can ask your oncologist to explain anything you are unclear about or to explain any words you are not familiar with.

#### **Diagnosis**

What kind of cancer do I have?

Where is the cancer at the moment? Has it spread to other parts of my body?

How common is my cancer?

## **Tests**

Are there any further tests that I need to have?

What will they tell us? Will they confirm my diagnosis?

What will I experience when having the test/s?

## **Prognosis**

How bad is this cancer and what is it going to mean for me?

What symptoms will the cancer cause?

What is the aim of the treatment? To cure the cancer or to control it and manage symptoms?

How likely is it that the cancer will spread to other parts of my body without any more treatment?

How likely is it that the cancer will spread to other parts of my body if I do have more treatment?

What is the expected survival for people with my type of cancer?

Is the treatment going to improve my chance of survival?

How likely is it that the treatment will improve my symptoms? Is it worth going through?

## **Treatment and information options**

### **Treatment options**

Is it necessary to have treatment right now?

If so, do I have a choice of treatments?

What are the pros and cons of each treatment option?

What can I expect if I decide not to have treatment?

How much time do I have to think about this?  
Do you need my decision today?  
What is your opinion about the best treatment for me?

### **Treatment plan**

What exactly will be done during the treatment and how will it affect me?  
When are these effects likely to happen?  
What is the treatment schedule, e.g. how many treatments will I have, how often, and for how long will I have treatment?  
Where will I have the treatment?  
Are there any advantages/disadvantages of the private versus public health system?

### **Preparing for treatment**

Is there anything that I can do before or after my treatment that might make it more effective, e.g. diet, work, exercise, etc?  
What are the do's and don'ts while having treatment?  
What problems should I look out for and who do I contact if they occur?  
Are there long-term side effects from the treatment?  
Will the treatment or illness reduce my sexual drive?  
Will I need any additional treatment after this?  
If so, what might that be?  
What is my long-term follow up plan?

## **Clinical trials**

What are clinical trials? Are there any that might be relevant for me?

Will I be treated any differently if I enrol in a trial?

## **Costs**

What will be the costs throughout my treatment, e.g. medication, chemotherapy, etc?

Am I eligible for any benefits if I cannot work?

## **Optimal Care**

Do you specialise in treating my type of cancer?

How well established is the treatment you are recommending?

Are there guidelines on how to treat my cancer?

Is there another specialist who treats this type of cancer that you recommend for a second opinion?

## **Multidisciplinary teams**

Do you work in a multidisciplinary team and what does this mean?

Can you explain the advantages of a team approach?

How do you all communicate with each other and me?

Who will be in charge of my care?

What do I do if I get conflicting information?





aspects of cancer and doctor-patient communication. The group consists of researchers from varied backgrounds including psychology, medicine, public health and nursing.

For more information visit the website at:  
[www.psych.usyd.edu.au/cemped/](http://www.psych.usyd.edu.au/cemped/)

The Cancer Institute NSW is Australia's first statewide, government-supported agency dedicated to the control and cure of cancer through prevention, detection, innovation, research and information.

For more information visit the website at:  
[www.cancerinstitute.org.au](http://www.cancerinstitute.org.au)

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