



Your Health Care Team: Understanding Their Roles

The effects of cancer can be serious. The good news is that help is available from the people who make up your health care team. However, it is important to remember that the most important member of your health care team is you.

Health care professionals and others can include:

Medical oncologist. A doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating cancers with chemotherapy, targeted therapies and other treatments. They manage cancer treatment and coordinate with the treatment team.

Surgical oncologist. A doctor who specializes in treating cancer with surgery.

Radiation oncologist. A doctor who specializes in treating cancer using radiation.

Oncology nurse. A health care professional who provides bedside care, preparing and administering treatments, providing supportive care and information to the person with cancer and their family about their cancer, treatments and side effects.

Oncology social worker. A health care professional who can provide emotional support through resource navigation, counseling and support groups and guide people through the process of applying for forms of practical assistance. CancerCare's oncology social workers are available to help face-to-face, online or on the telephone, free of charge.

Patient navigator. Navigators provide guidance through the health care system to help with any issues or challenges. They may offer practical assistance with financial support, insurance benefits, transportation or child care. In addition, they may assist in coordinating care with other health care team members.

Psychiatrist. A psychiatrist specializes in mental health, helping with depression, anxiety and more. Because they are medical doctors, psychiatrists can prescribe medications such as anti-depressants, anti-anxiety medication or sleep aids.

Dietitian. A certified or registered dietitian helps people manage their eating and hydration needs related to cancer. They can answer questions about appetite, weight loss or gain and issues related to chewing or swallowing.

Home health aide. A licensed professional who assists people with their personal care, including bathing, dressing and other activities of daily living. They may also assist with cooking and other household chores.

Pharmacist. A professional who is qualified to fill prescription medications. They often provide information on how to take medications, potential side effects and tips on taking them on schedule.

Clergy. Prayer, spiritual counseling and a strong sense of spirituality help many people face difficult challenges with courage and hope.