



Talking with the Doctor

If your loved one takes you with him to talk with the doctor, here are some tips:

If you don't like how a question was answered, tell the doctor that you need her to explain more to help you understand.

Talk with the doctor about any medical advice you find. Some advice may be false or misleading, or may conflict with what the doctor has told your loved one.

If a concern is not being addressed, ask the question in a different way. This may help the doctor understand your concern better.

Take notes or ask if you can tape-record the visit.

Know that your loved one has the right to change doctors if he feels his needs aren't being addressed.

Questions To Ask About Treatment

What medical records, or copies, would you like us to bring?

What can my loved one do beforehand to prepare for treatment?

How long will the treatment take?

Can my loved one go to and from treatment alone? Should someone else go with him?

Can I or another family member be with my loved one during the treatment?

What can I do to help her feel more comfortable during the treatment?

What are the side effects of the treatment?

After treatment, what do we need to watch for? When should we call you?

How does filing insurance claims work? Who can help us if we have questions or problems?

Asking About Pain

Although different side effects happen with cancer treatment, many caregivers say the one thing they hesitate to ask about is pain. Yet, people who have their pain managed are able to focus on healing and on enjoying life. If someone is preoccupied by pain, you may notice personality changes. These might include being distant, not being able to sleep, or not being able to focus on daily activities.

The medical team should ask regularly about pain levels, but it's up to you and your loved one to be open about any pain. The patient does not have to be in pain or discomfort. Some people assume that there will always be severe pain with cancer treatment. This is not true. Pain can be managed throughout your loved one's treatment. The key is to talk regularly with the health care team about pain and other symptoms.

Sometimes people with cancer don't want to talk to their health care team about their pain. They worry that others will think that they are complaining or that pain means the

cancer is getting worse. Or they think that pain is just something they have to accept. Sometimes people get used to the pain and forget what it's like to live without it.

This is when it is important for you to encourage your loved one to speak up. Or you can speak up on his behalf. Be honest with the doctor about pain and how it is affecting the daily routine. You and your loved one may need to have talks at different times to continue to feel comfortable about the pain medicines given. These drugs can also be adjusted or changed if they aren't working or are having unpleasant side effects.

Don't be afraid to ask for stronger pain relievers or larger doses if your loved one needs them. Addiction is rarely an issue in people with cancer. Instead, drugs help patients stay as comfortable as possible.

Should We Get a Second Opinion?

Some people worry that doctors will be offended if they ask for a second opinion. Usually the opposite is true. Most doctors welcome a second opinion. And many health insurance companies will pay for them.

If your loved one gets a second opinion, the doctor may agree with the first doctor's treatment plan. Or the second doctor may suggest another approach. Either way, your loved one has more information and perhaps a greater sense of control. You both can feel more confident about the decisions you make, knowing that you've looked at your options.

Cancer pain can almost always be relieved.

There are many different medicines and methods available to control cancer pain. You should expect your doctor to seek all the information and resources necessary to make you as comfortable as possible. However, no one doctor can know everything about all medical problems. If you are in pain and your doctor suggests no other options, ask to see a pain specialist or have your doctor consult with a pain specialist. Pain specialists may be oncologists, anesthesiologists, neurologists, or neurosurgeons, other doctors, nurses, or pharmacists. A pain control team may also include psychologists and social workers.

If you have trouble locating a pain program or specialist, contact a cancer center, a hospice, or the oncology department at your local hospital or medical center. The National Cancer Institute's (NCI) Cancer Information Service (CIS) and other organizations can give you a list of pain management facilities. The American Cancer Society (ACS) and other organizations may also be able to provide names of pain specialists, pain clinics, or programs in your area.