

## ► PREPARING TO VISIT THE DOCTOR: ◀ QUESTIONS ON CANCER DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Patients may find themselves under great stress when consulting a physician about the possibility of cancer. This makes it difficult to concentrate fully and to remember all of what has taken place during the office visit. It also makes it difficult for patients to ask all the questions they had intended.

Taking notes at this time makes it easier to review what has been said. It also helps to have a family member or friend along to take part in the discussion, to take notes or just to listen.

In addition, preparing questions similar to those suggested below makes it easier to obtain the information you need. If additional questions arise afterwards, patients shouldn't hesitate to call their physician for answers or to clarify any points.

To diagnose cancer, physicians perform a biopsy, in which a sample of cells is removed for examination. Patients who need a biopsy may want to ask their physician questions such as these:

- What type of biopsy will I have?
- Why?
- Who will perform it?
- What does it involve?
- How long will it take?
- Will I be awake?

- Will it hurt?
- How soon will I know the results?
- If I have cancer, who will talk with me about treatment and when?

Radiology and other studies may also be performed. These questions may be helpful to ask before such tests:

- What type of radiology procedure or other test will I have?
- Why?
- What does it involve?
- How long will it take?
- Will I be awake?
- Will it hurt?
- How soon will I know the results?
- If I have cancer, who will talk with me about treatment and when?

When seeing a physician following diagnosis to discuss treatment options, questions similar to these may be helpful:

- What is my diagnosis?
- What is the stage of my disease?
- What are my treatment choices?
- Which do you recommend for me and why?

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- What other cancer-treatment doctor will I see?
- How successful is the treatment likely to be?
- Do I need a second opinion?
- Will I need to stay in the hospital, or will I be treated as an outpatient?
- What are the risks and possible side effects of each treatment?
- How long will treatment last?
- Will I need to change my normal activities?
- What is the treatment likely to cost?
- Would a clinical trial be appropriate for me?

Clinical trials, or research studies, of new treatment methods are designed to find ways to improve cancer treatment. Some compare a new treatment with a standard approach; others are designed to find out whether the new approach is both safe and effective and to answer scientific questions. Patients who take part in these trials make an important contribution to medical science and may have the first chance to benefit from improved treatment methods.

Patients considering surgery may want to ask their surgeon questions such as these:

- What kind of operation will I have?
- How will I feel after the operation?
- If I have pain, how will you help me?
- How long must I remain in the hospital?
- Will I have to do special exercises?
- Will my appearance be changed temporarily or permanently in any way?
- If so, how?
- How can this be remedied?

Patients who are considering radiation therapy may want to ask the radiation oncologist the following questions?

- What will this treatment accomplish?
- When will the treatments begin and end?
- How will I feel during therapy?
- What are the side effects?
- How can I handle them?

Patients may want to ask their medical oncologist the following questions before chemotherapy:

- What will this treatment accomplish?
- How will it be administered?
- What medications will I be taking?
- Will there be side effects?
- How can I handle them?
- How long will I need to take this treatment?

*For an appointment with a Jefferson physician, more information or health information and education programs, please call **1-800-JEFF-NOW** (1-800-533-3669) or visit our Web site at **[www.JeffersonHospital.org](http://www.JeffersonHospital.org)***

*Jefferson also offers a number of cancer support and education programs as well as a Buddy Program in which survivors of cancer provide support and encouragement to patients who are newly diagnosed and an active cancer advocacy group. You'll find information on the Jefferson Web site about these programs or by calling 1-800-JEFF-NOW.*

*Speech- or hearing-impaired callers can access JEFF NOW® by calling 1-800-654-5984.*