



This Information Sheet will help you make sense of “who’s who” in your cancer care team.

From the time you hear you have cancer there will be many adjustments to make. You will meet a bewildering number of health professionals who are involved in your care. Not all hospital and community-based staff employed by the hospital will wear uniforms; however, they will all be identified by their hospital identification badges. Look for this if you are unsure who you are talking to, and how they fit in to your cancer care team.

Doctors in your cancer care team

Doctors who specialise in the study and treatment of cancers are known as **oncologists**. (Oncology is the study of tumours and is often used as another word for cancer.) Oncologists are usually described as either **radiation oncologists** (those who specialise in treating cancer with radiation treatment) – or **medical oncologists** (those who specialise in treatments, such as chemotherapy and hormone therapies). Radiation treatment is the use of high-energy X-rays to kill cancer cells. Chemotherapy is treatment with drugs to destroy cancer cells or to prevent or slow down further growth. Hormones are chemicals produced by special body cells which help regulate and co-ordinate various body functions, for example, growth, metabolism and reproduction. Hormone therapy is the use of synthetic hormones to control some cancers, for example, breast and prostate cancers that may depend on hormones for their growth.

Haematologists are specialists who treat people with cancers affecting the blood, for example, leukaemia, or blood forming organs, such as the bone marrow.

Each oncologist has a doctor called a **registrar**, working with them. Oncology and haematology registrars are doctors who are training to become specialists. Generally, registrars are assigned to the oncology or haematology team for several months. You will frequently meet the registrar in outpatient clinics and in the ward. They work very closely with the specialist.

House surgeons are the next level down in seniority. They are in the seventh and eighth year of their medical training. The seventh year is a probationary year where the doctors work in a variety of clinical areas to gain experience. At the end of the seventh year they are registered to practise as doctors. You will meet house surgeons in the outpatient clinic and in the ward.

Trainee interns are the level below house surgeons. They are medical students in the sixth year of their training. They will also work in clinics and hospital wards.

Other specialists

Specialists may be necessary to get additional expert advice on how best to treat your cancer. Some examples of these are:

- **Dermatologists** – doctors who specialise in diseases of the skin.
- **Gynaecologists** – doctors who specialise in diseases of women’s reproductive system.
- **Urologists** – doctors who specialise in diseases of the urinary tract of both males and females, and of the genital organs in males.
- **Neurologists** – doctors who specialise in disorders of the nervous system.
- **Endocrinologists** – doctors who specialise in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the hormone system.

- **Gastroenterologist** – doctors who specialise in diseases of the digestive system.

As part of your treatment you may require surgery. Specialist surgeons include:

- **Neurosurgeons** – for surgery involving the brain or nervous system.
- **Breast surgeons** – for surgery involving the breast.
- **Colo-rectal surgeons** – for surgery involving the bowel.
- **Plastic surgeons** – for skin-grafting and where appearance is very important, such as surgery involving the head and neck area.

Sometimes you will see another specialist in combination with your oncologist. Alternatively, it may involve a separate visit. The specialist and your oncologist will then talk about your treatment.

Nurses in your cancer care team

Nurses are trained to assess, monitor and report the symptoms and side effects of cancer and cancer treatments. Depending on their place of work, they will also administer chemotherapy. Providing information and education on all aspects of cancer care is a key nursing role. Nurses are skilled listeners and provide practical and emotional care for people with cancer and their families.

You will meet the outpatient nurses and ward nurses as part of your contact with these areas. For the community-based nurses to visit you, you will need a referral from your GP or cancer centre team. They can arrange and advise on other services you may require, for example, home help. They will also provide equipment to assist you as needed.

If you are taking part in a clinical trial you will meet the research nurse whose job is to co-ordinate your care during the trial and maintain data relating to the trial.

Radiation Therapists

You will meet radiation therapists if you are having radiation treatment. They are trained to operate the treatment machines that deliver your radiation treatment. The radiation oncologist will have prescribed your individual radiation treatment. Radiation therapists will explain the possible side-effects of radiation treatment and advise you on skin care during your treatment.

Oncology Social Workers

Oncology social workers are trained in support and counselling in a number of areas, such as:

- adjusting to illness and the resulting changes in lifestyle.
- managing feelings of anxiety and depression.
- assisting with relationships between family and friends.
- reactions of loss and grief.
- loneliness.
- stress.

Information and advice can be given to you about community resources that may assist with:

- accommodation.
- education.
- employment.
- family care arrangements.
- finances.
- managing at home.