

## **Finding a New Doctor [1]**

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 07/2014

### **Key Messages:**

- A variety of circumstances may require you to search for a new oncologist, which is a doctor who specializes in treating cancer.
- Although the idea of switching doctors may feel upsetting or overwhelming, you can take steps to find an oncologist whom you like and trust.
- Once you have chosen a new oncologist, you will need to arrange to have your medical records transferred from your current doctor's office.

### **Coping with finding a new oncologist**

At some point, you may need to search for a new doctor for your cancer treatment and care because you are moving to a new location or you are changing health insurance plans, or your doctor is moving or retiring. However, the idea of changing oncologists may be upsetting if you developed a strong, long-term relationship with your current or previous doctor. For instance, you may experience anxiety about the process of finding a doctor whom you like, reviewing the details of your cancer diagnosis and previous treatment with a new doctor, or getting to know new office staff. Although it may take time to establish a new relationship with a doctor, you can take steps to find a new oncologist whom you trust and with whom you feel comfortable.

### **Locating a new oncologist**

First, make a list of potential doctors, identifying oncologists who have experience treating your specific type of cancer [3]. Consider using these strategies to create that list:

- Ask your current oncologist and primary care physician to recommend doctors in your area or in the area to which you are moving.
- Call your health insurance plan's member services line to ask for a list of oncologists, or search the insurance plan's website, if available.
- Call local hospitals; most hospitals have a physician referral service. Or take a look at a [list of National Cancer Institute-designated cancer centers](#) [4] that specialize in cancer research and patient programs. Your nearest cancer center can provide information on oncologists who practice at that center.

- Ask for recommendations from family members; friends; members of a support group [5], if you belong to one; or other acquaintances who have had cancer.
- Search online physician directories. The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) provides a free, searchable database of ASCO member oncologists [6] who wish to make their information public on Cancer.Net. Other medical associations, such as the American Medical Association [7] and the American College of Surgeons [8], have online databases of doctors.

## **Narrowing your list**

Once you have a list of potential oncologists, you may want to consider the following questions to focus your choices:

- What are the doctor's credentials? Is he or she board certified?
- What is the doctor's education, training, number of years in practice, and experience with your type of cancer?
- How many patients with your type of cancer does the doctor see each year?
- Does the doctor participate in your insurance plan?
- Is the doctor accepting new patients?
- How convenient are the office hours and location?
- Does the office have supportive staff?
- How easy is it to get an appointment or speak with the doctor?
- Who handles emergencies when the doctor is unavailable?

You may be able to get some of this information from the source of your referral, or you may choose to contact the doctor's office directly. In addition, consider calling a few oncologists to schedule a consultation to meet the doctor and the office staff. If you currently live too far away to meet in person, you may be able to talk with the doctor on the telephone. However, keep in mind that you may be charged for the doctor's time and that the charge may not be covered by your health insurance.

In addition to getting answers to practical questions, you will get a sense of the doctor's communication and practice styles. Take note of how comfortable you feel with each oncologist, including whether the doctor talks to you in a way you can understand and whether he or she encourages and answers your questions.

All the information you gather will help you decide which doctor is right for you. Trust your instincts. However, even if you feel you made the right decision, it may take time for you and your new oncologist to develop a comfortable relationship. Also remember that, if you are not happy with your choice after some time, you have the tools to switch to a different doctor.

## **Providing information your new oncologist will need**

Once you have chosen a new oncologist, you will need to transfer your medical records from your current doctor's office. Ask the office staff what procedures you should follow. Usually, you will be required to give written permission, allowing the office to copy and transfer your records. In addition, you may want to ask for a copy of your records for your own reference; different formats, such as a CD or flash drive, may be available. Some offices may charge fee to copy

your records for personal use.

## **More Information**

[The Cancer Care Team](#) [9]

[Choosing a Doctor for Your Cancer Care](#) [10]

[Managing Your Care](#) [11]

## **Additional Resources**

[National Cancer Institute: How To Find a Doctor or Treatment Facility If You Have Cancer](#) [12]

[Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: Choosing a Doctor](#) [13]

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### **Links:**

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/cancer-basics/cancer-care-team/finding-new-doctor>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/cancer-basics/cancer-care-team/find-nci-designated-cancer-center>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25383>
- [6] <http://www.cancer.net/find-cancer-doctor>
- [7] <https://apps.ama-assn.org/doctorfinder/recaptcha.jsp>
- [8] [http://www.facs.org/public\\_info/yourhealth/findadoc.html](http://www.facs.org/public_info/yourhealth/findadoc.html)
- [9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24932>
- [10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24949>
- [11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25015>
- [12] <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Therapy/doctor-facility>
- [13] <http://archive.ahrq.gov/consumer/qnt/qntdr.htm>