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## The Oncology Team

**This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board, 01/2016**

### cancer.net\_video\_graphic.png



Watch the [Cancer.Net Video: The Oncology Team - Why is Multidisciplinary Care So Important, with Michelle Lau, MD](#) [1], adapted from this content.

Diagnosing and treating cancer is complex. People often need the experience and skills of several different medical professionals to treat cancer. Read below to learn more about the members of the oncology team.

### Your oncologist

An oncologist is a doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating cancer. Your oncologist oversees your care from diagnosis throughout the course of the disease. In general, a person with cancer is often treated by a team of oncologists who specialize in different areas of oncology. Learn more about the different [types of oncologists](#) [2].

### Other members of your oncology team

With many specialists on the team, it is often difficult to understand each person's role. You will find more information about the professionals involved in your care below.

• **Oncology nurse.** Oncology nurses serve in many roles depending on their experience, advanced education, and specialized certification. The responsibilities of an oncology nurse may include:

- Giving a physical examination
- Giving chemotherapy and other medications
- Identifying patient needs
- Coordinating care with the other members of the oncology team
- Educating and counseling patients and families
- Performing research as part of a clinical trial

• **Oncology nurse practitioner (NP).** NPs meet with patients independently while collaborating with the oncology team. They are supervised by an oncologist. The responsibilities of an oncology nurse may include:

- Giving physical examinations and evaluating a person's health
- Diagnosing and treating certain conditions
- Recommending diagnostic and laboratory tests, and reading the results
- Prescribing medications and giving chemotherapy
- Managing cancer and treatment side effects
- Educating and counseling people about cancer
- Performing certain procedures

- Performing research as part of a clinical trial
- **Patient navigator.** This individual guides patients from diagnosis through survivorship, and serves as a resource for counseling, financial, and other support services. Patient navigators can be nurses, social workers, or volunteers.
- **Palliative care doctors and nurses.** The palliative care team works closely with the other oncology team members to prevent and treat symptoms of cancer and treatment. A palliative care doctor is especially helpful if a patient is still experiencing pain and other symptoms of cancer despite treatment for these symptoms.
- **Physician assistant (PA).** A PA works with a doctor, delivering a broad range of services. The responsibilities of a PA may include:
  - Performing physical examinations
  - Recommending diagnostic and laboratory tests, and reading the results
  - Helping with surgery
  - Managing cancer and treatment side effects
  - Prescribing medications and giving chemotherapy
  - Educating and counseling people about cancer
  - Performing certain procedures
- **Oncology social worker.** An oncology social worker can help patients cope with cancer and the challenges the disease brings. This may include leading support groups, providing counseling, or helping patients find financial support and other resources.
- **Pathologist.** A pathologist is a medical doctor who specializes in looking at cells, tissues, and organs to diagnose disease. It is most likely that you will never meet your pathologist. However, your pathologist plays an important role in determining the type of cancer you

have. The responsibilities of a pathologist may include:

- Determining the results of tests done on tissue samples
  - Providing the final diagnosis of cancer
  - Working directly with the treating doctors
- **Registered dietitian (RD).** An RD provides education on eating well and provides recommendations to help people with cancer cope with dietary needs. In hospitals and other health care facilities, the dietitian provides medical nutrition therapy.
  - **Diagnostic radiologist.** A radiologist is a medical doctor specialized in using imaging tests to help diagnose disease. The responsibilities of a diagnostic radiologist include reviewing and interpreting the results of imaging tests.
  - **Rehabilitation therapist, such as physical, occupational, speech, or recreational therapists.** These professionals help people with cancer return to their highest level of independence. For example, they can help people with brain tumors regain speech and independence or help women with breast cancer learn exercises to regain strength after a mastectomy.
  - **Chaplain or other religious support.** A chaplain offers spiritual support and rituals for patients and their families. These professionals may also lead support groups. Most hospitals have clergy on staffs that work with people of all faiths. However, some people may prefer to work with their own clergy person.

## More Information

[The Cancer Care Team](#) [3]

[Finding a New Doctor](#) [4]

[Finding a Treatment Facility](#) [5]

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### Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/node/27101>

- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25356>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24932>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/22950>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/22938>