Organizing Your Cancer Care [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 03/2012

Listen to theCancer.Net Podcast: Organizing Your Cancer Care[3], adapted from this content.

As a person with cancer, or friend or family member of someone with cancer, you may be gathering information about cancer and cancer treatment options, making appointments, getting test results, collecting records, and managing financesâ€"all of which may feel overwhelming. Organization helps you gain control over your schedule and the information you receive to allow you to make well-informed decisions at the right times. This article provides some suggestions to help you organize your cancer care.

Filing information about your cancer and cancer care

A large part of managing your cancer care involves organizing information. Placing documents in a filing cabinet or simple desktop divider with alphabetized folders makes it easy to quickly find the information you need. Your files may include the following documents:

- Information on your type of cancer [4], including articles from Cancer.Net or other trusted websites
- Notes that you take during appointments with your doctors
- Contact information for those involved in your care, including doctors, hospitals, and insurance companies, with phone numbers to call if you need help during non-business hours
- Financial information, including medical bills and health insurance claims [5]
- Your medical history [6], including your diagnoses, treatments, and current medications. These are very important if you change doctors, have a recurrence (return of cancer after treatment), or lose original medical records.
- Your treatment plan and summary [7], which has information about your cancer treatment and follow-up care

File new information as soon as possible to prevent it from getting lost. In addition, as files on general topics grow larger over time, divide them into topics that are more specific.

Preparing for appointments

Planning helps reduce stress on the day of an appointment. Use a paper or electronic calendar to

keep track of upcoming appointments. When scheduling an appointment, ask about the location, parking availability, insurance coverage, cancelation policies, and any other information you may need to know in advance [8]. And before leaving for an appointment, consider writing down the address and phone number, printing directions, and preparing a list of questions [9] to ask the doctor. If you need transportation assistance, schedule it at least one week in advance, and confirm the date and time one day before.

Managing finances

The following tips may help you keep your finances in order while receiving cancer care.

Adjust your budget. If possible, make changes in advance to your budget to compensate for any loss of income resulting from less time at work or from expenses that insurance does not cover. If you have limited funds, consider making special arrangements with creditors. Learn more about managing the cost of cancer care [10].

Seek help for paying bills. If you feel unable to manage your daily and monthly obligations at this time, ask a friend or family member to keep track of your regular monthly bills, or consider using a bill-paying service to help make your payments on time.

Review your health insurance plan benefits and policies. Understanding which medical services your health insurance company covers and what percentage of the costs it covers can help you plan for upcoming expenses and verify that the medical bills you receive are accurate.

Take notes during conversations with health insurance companies. These notes should include the date of the conversation, the name of the person with whom you spoke, brief notes about what was said, and the reference number the person gives you when changes are made to your claims. Put the newest records at the front of the file so that you can view the history of those conversations easily. Learn more about organizing your insurance paperwork [11].

Other helpful organizational tips

Here are some additional principles to help you stay organized and save time.

- Don't be afraid to let someone help you manage all of the paperwork. It may be difficult to do this on your own, especially if you feel tired or sick.
- Find permanent locations to store important items to avoid wasting time searching. For example, you may decide to keep all prescription medications in a bathroom cabinet and all files in a desk drawer.
- Write a list or use an electronic task manager to keep track of tasks you need to accomplish between appointments. Put a check mark beside each one when you complete it, marking your progress.
- Set reminders to prevent you from forgetting important appointments or tasks. Many electronic calendars and task lists have settings that allow you to receive a message, such as an email or a text message, reminding you hours or days before an appointment or a task deadline.

More Information

Keeping a Personal Medical Record [12]

Managing Your Care [13]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/managing-your-care/organizing-your-cancer-care
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://bcove.me/qcub66g1
[4] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/24955
[6] http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/vignette/my_history.pdf
[7] http://www.cancer.net/node/25394
[8] http://www.cancer.net/node/25063
[9] http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/diagnosing-cancer/questions-ask-doctor
[10] http://www.cancer.net/node/24865
[11] http://www.cancer.net/node/24916
[12] http://www.cancer.net/node/24569
[13] http://www.cancer.net/node/25015