

SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS IN CANCER CARE

Created by OMPRN as part of its Patient-Oriented Microlesson initiative. Stock illustrations by HilaryDesign, content by Leigh-Ann van Strijp, Karen Haas and Terry Hawrysh, design and layout by Leigh-Ann van Strijp, edited by Kyster Nanan.



This infographic serves as a guide for patients about medical professionals involved in cancer care. It outlines various specialists and their most common roles in the diagnosis and management of cancer. Included are examples of questions that each type of support professional is best equipped to answer. If that support professional is not available, you should engage with other members of your care team who can direct you appropriately. Individual experiences may vary, and the roles of the support professionals on your own care team may differ depending on the resources available at your treatment center. This infographic is for educational purposes only. Patients and their families must consult with their primary healthcare provider or seek advice from medical professionals for personalized information regarding their specific condition.

Location of support professional:

Mainly in a hospital setting

Often outside of a hospital setting



MEDICAL ONCOLOGIST

Medical oncologists play a crucial role in the comprehensive care of cancer patients, focusing on the non-surgical aspects of cancer treatment.

Specific Roles of a Medical Oncologist:

- Recommending specialized tests that detect biomarkers for specific forms of cancer
- Responsible for prescribing and administering chemotherapy
- After completing active treatment, medical oncologists continue to monitor patients through regular follow-up appointments. They assess treatment efficacy, manage late side effects, and address any concerns or symptoms that may arise.

Questions to ask a Medical Oncologist:

1. Are there clinical trials or research studies relevant to my case?
2. Are there lifestyle changes or complementary therapies that may benefit me?
3. What health outcomes can I hope to achieve through this therapy?
4. What are the potential side effects of the proposed treatment and would it impact my quality of life?

SURGICAL ONCOLOGIST

A surgical oncologist is a specialized surgeon who focuses on the diagnosis, treatment, and management of cancer through surgical procedures.

Specific Roles of a Surgical Oncologist:

- Performs surgical procedures to remove cancerous tissues or tumours. The goal is to remove as much cancerous tissue as possible while preserving normal organs and tissues.
- They may perform biopsies to obtain tissue samples for laboratory analysis.

Questions to ask a Surgical Oncologist:

1. Why do you recommend surgery, and what are the goals of the procedure?
2. What are the risks and potential complications of the surgery?
3. Can you provide a description of your surgical approach (e.g. anesthesia, pre-op, etc.)?
4. What can I expect to happen on the day of my surgery?



RADIATION ONCOLOGIST

A radiation oncologist is a medical doctor who specializes in the treatment of cancer using radiation therapy.

Specific Roles of a Radiation Oncologist:

- They evaluate a patient's medical history, diagnostic imaging, and pathology reports to determine whether radiation therapy would be useful.
- They supervise the administration of radiation therapy to deliver precise and effective doses of radiation to the tumor.
- After completing radiation therapy, radiation oncologists monitor patients to assess treatment response and manage any side effects.

Questions to ask a Radiation Oncologist:

1. What are the potential immediate, short term and long-term side effects of radiation therapy?
2. Will I need any additional treatments in conjunction with radiation therapy?
3. What is the place and purpose of radiation oncology in the management of my cancer?

ONCOLOGY NURSE

Oncology nurses play a critical role in the care and support of individuals diagnosed with cancer. They work closely with patients, their families, and other members of the healthcare team.

Specific Roles of an Oncology Nurse:

- Assess a patient's physical and emotional well-being, including symptoms related to cancer and side effects of treatments.
- Monitor vital signs, lab results, and other indicators to track patients' health.
- Educate patients and their families about the cancer diagnosis, treatment options, potential side effects, and strategies for managing symptoms. They provide information on self-care, medications, and lifestyle adjustments.

Questions to ask an Oncology Nurse:

1. How can I manage and alleviate treatment related symptoms at home?
2. What signs or symptoms should I report immediately and who do I report them to?
3. How can I best involve my family or caregivers in my care?
4. What resources are available so I can understand and learn more about my disease and treatments?



ONCOLOGY PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

Oncology Physician Assistants play vital roles in the care and management of cancer patients. They work closely with oncologists and other healthcare professionals to provide comprehensive and patient-centered care.

Specific Roles of an Oncology Physician Assistant:

- Conduct a thorough patient assessment and gather relevant information to assist in diagnosing and treating cancer.
- Contribute to the development of individualized treatment plans for cancer patients.
- Assist in coordinating various aspects of treatment, including surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and other modalities.

Questions to ask an Oncology Physician Assistant:

1. What are the potential side effects of the recommended treatments, and how can they be managed?
2. How can I communicate effectively with the healthcare team, and who should I contact with questions or concerns?
3. Can you answer some questions I have about the consent form so I understand risks vs benefits related to my therapy?

GENETIC COUNSELLOR

Genetic Counsellors play a fundamental role in oncology by providing specialized guidance and support to individuals and families with a genetic predisposition to cancer.

Specific Roles of a Genetic counsellors:

- Conduct thorough assessments of a patient's personal and family medical histories to identify potential genetic risk factors for cancer as well as assess the risk of hereditary cancer syndromes based on family history, genetic testing, and other relevant factors.
- Provide clear and understandable information about the genetics of cancer, the potential impact of genetic mutations, and the hereditary nature of certain cancers.

Questions to ask a genetic Counsellor:

1. How will my genetic test results be interpreted, and what do they mean for my cancer risk?
2. How often should I undergo cancer screenings, and what types of screenings are recommended?
3. What are the next steps in my personalized care plan, and how often should I follow up with a genetic counsellor?



PATHOLOGIST & MOLECULAR PATHOLOGIST

Pathologists and Molecular Pathologists play critical roles in the diagnosis and management of cancer. They study tissue samples and other specimens to determine the presence, type, and characteristics of cancer.

Specific Roles of a Pathologists:

- Grade cancer cells to assess their degree of abnormality and aggressiveness (Pathologists).
- Investigate the molecular and genetic characteristics of cancer cells obtained from biopsies, surgeries, or other procedures, including identifying specific biomarkers that may influence treatment decisions (Molecular Pathologists).

Questions to ask Pathologists:

1. Can you explain the grade and stage of my cancer?
2. What are the key characteristics of my tumour based on the pathology report?
3. Are there specific molecular or genetic biomarkers identified in my cancer cells?
4. How does the pathology report impact my treatment plan?

MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

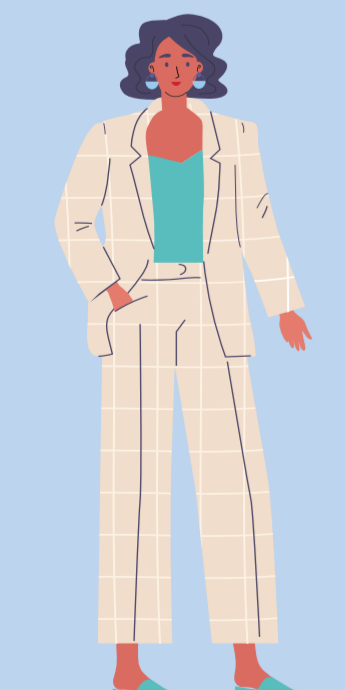
Mental Health Professionals provide support and care to individuals who are facing cancer diagnoses, undergoing treatment, or dealing with the emotional and psychological impact of cancer.

Specific Roles of a Mental Health Professional:

- Provide emotional support to individuals and their families as they navigate the challenges associated with a cancer diagnosis, treatment and survivorship.
- Teach and reinforce effective coping strategies to help individuals manage the emotional distress, anxiety, and depression that can accompany a cancer diagnosis.
- Conduct psychosocial assessments to understand the emotional and social factors that may impact an individual's ability to cope with cancer and its treatment.

Questions to ask a Mental Health Professional:

1. How can we address any anxiety or fear I have about my cancer?
2. What resources or support groups are available for cancer patients?
3. How can I navigate conversations about cancer with my loved ones, and do you offer family or couples counselling?



DIETITIAN

A Dietitian's expertise in nutrition and diet helps individuals manage the side effects of cancer treatment, maintain optimal nutritional status, and improve overall well-being.

Specific Roles of a Dietitian:

- Conduct thorough assessments of a patient's nutritional status, considering their medical history, dietary habits, and specific nutritional needs related to cancer and its treatment.
- Develop individualized nutrition plans tailored to each patient's specific cancer type, treatment regimen, and overall health status.
- Address and manage treatment-related side effects, such as nausea, vomiting, appetite loss, taste changes, and weight loss, through dietary interventions.

Questions to ask a Dietitian

1. Are there supplements or nutritional interventions that I should consider?
2. Can you provide guidance on meal planning and preparation, considering my current energy levels and any limitations I may have?
3. How can I maintain a well-balanced and nutritious diet when dealing with food aversions or cravings?

PHARMACIST

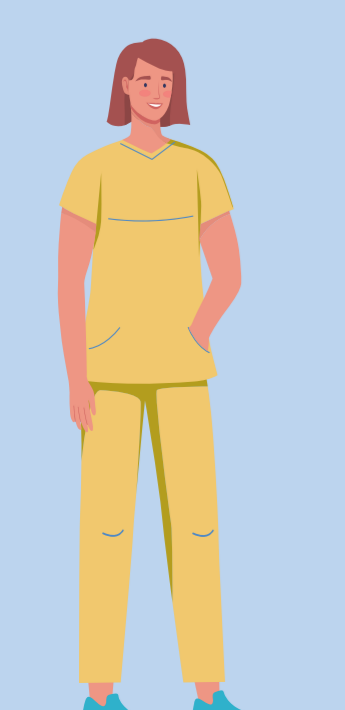
Pharmacists specialize in the management of medications used in cancer treatment. Their expertise extends to a range of responsibilities, ensuring safe and effective medication use.

Specific Roles of a Pharmacist:

- Collaborate with oncologists to select the most appropriate medications for cancer treatment based on the patient's diagnosis, stage, and individual characteristics.
- Monitor drug levels in the patient's blood and adjust doses as needed to maintain therapeutic levels while minimizing toxicity.
- Provide recommendations and interventions to manage and minimize side effects associated with cancer medications.

Questions to ask a Pharmacist:

1. What are the potential side effects of my medications, and how can they be managed or minimized?
2. How should I take my medications, and are there any specific instructions or precautions I should be aware of?
3. Are there potential interactions between my cancer medications and other medications or supplements I am taking?



HOME HEALTH AIDE

A Home Health Aide provides support and assistance to individuals receiving cancer care in their homes. Their responsibilities extend beyond basic caregiving tasks to address the unique needs and challenges faced by cancer patients.

Specific Roles of a Home Health Aide:

- Assist with activities of daily living, including bathing, grooming, dressing, and mobility assistance, to ensure the comfort and well-being of the patient.
- Regularly monitor and record vital signs, such as blood pressure, heart rate, and temperature, to track the patient's overall health.
- Assist with the use of medical equipment, such as mobility aids, oxygen equipment or assistive devices, ensuring the patient's safety and comfort.

Questions to ask a Home Health Aide:

1. Can you provide guidance on managing common symptoms or side effects at home?
2. Are there specific signs or symptoms that you want me to be aware of and report to you or that you want me to be aware of and monitoring that can be done in the comfort of my home safely and reliably to reduce the need of clinical visits?
3. Are there tests and monitoring that can be done in the comfort of my home safely and reliably to reduce the need of clinical visits?

