When to Get a Second Opinion

After you have been diagnosed with cancer and given possible treatment options, you may want thoughts from another doctor. This is called a second opinion, and may involve the same or similar tests as before. This fact sheet covers:

- **Your approach to a second opinion**
- **Ways a second opinion can help**
- **When a second opinion can be most valuable**
- **The value of oncology social workers**

Looking for a Second Opinion

You may worry that asking for a second opinion may be uncomfortable. However, doing so may be very important.

You can discuss getting a second opinion with the doctor who diagnosed you. Most doctors welcome a second opinion. A second opinion can provide more information about your diagnosis and treatment options. They may even have a recommendation.

It is important to be clear and upfront. Here are a few statements that can help start the conversation with your doctor:

- "I respect your opinion, but I would like to speak with one other expert before starting your recommended treatment. How can I proceed?"
- "A second opinion may reassure me that I am doing the right thing. I'd like to talk with another doctor to be sure. What is the next step?"
- "This is all so new to me and I feel that a second opinion could make things clear."

If you need to find a doctor to get your second opinion, contact a medical society associated with your cancer, academic medical institution or a National Cancer Institute-designated facility. You can contact the National Cancer Institute at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237).

It is a good idea to go for a second opinion at a different medical institution, since this will involve different clinics and doctors.

How a Second Opinion Can Help

A second opinion can help to do the following:

- Confirm your correct diagnosis, including stage
- Determine if the cancer has spread
- Give perspective from different experts (such as a radiation oncologist or surgical oncologist)
- Determine whether clinical trials or alternative therapies are available
- Consider other treatment options
- Give confidence on how to proceed with your care

When a Second Opinion Can Be Important

- You have a rare or unusual cancer
- You feel uncomfortable with your doctor, the diagnosis or you need confirmation
- Your health insurance requires it
- The treatment offered has side effects or risks that you find disconcerting
- The treatment options will result in unacceptable demands on your life and your family
- Your doctor's treatment goals are different from your own
- Your cancer is not responding to your current treatment

An Oncology Social Worker Can Help

Oncology social workers understand the difficult issues that surround a second opinion. They can help you navigate this process and make you feel comfortable talking with your health care team. Cancer*Care*'s professional oncology social workers can help, free of charge. To speak with a professional oncology social worker, call 800-813-HOPE (4673).

Cancer*Care*® Can Help

For over 80 years, Cancer*Care* has empowered millions of people affected by cancer through free counseling, resource navigation, support groups, educational resources, advocacy and direct financial assistance. Our oncology social workers improve the lives of people diagnosed with cancer, caregivers, survivors and the bereaved, by addressing their emotional, practical and financial challenges.

To learn more, visit **www.cancercare.org** or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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