

Your cancer treatment team



This information will help you make sense of 'who's who' in your cancer treatment team.

From the time you hear you have cancer, you will meet a number of health professionals who will be involved in your care. This can sometimes be confusing. Not all hospital and community-based staff employed by the hospital will wear uniforms; however, they will all be identified by their hospital identification badges. Look for this if you are unsure who you are talking to, and how they fit in to your cancer care team.

Doctors in your cancer care team

Oncologist: A doctor who specialises in the study and treatment of cancer. **Oncologists** are usually described as either radiation oncologists (doctors who specialise in treating cancer with radiation treatment) or medical **oncologists** (doctors who specialise in treatments, such as

chemotherapy, hormone therapy and immunotherapy).

- **Radiation treatment** is the use of high energy X-rays to kill cancer cells.
- **Chemotherapy** is treatment with medication to destroy cancer cells or to prevent or slow down further growth.
- **Hormone therapy** is the use of synthetic hormones to control some cancers, for example, breast and prostate cancers that may depend on hormones for their growth. Hormones are chemicals produced by special body cells that help regulate and control many body functions.
- **Immunotherapy** is treatment that aims to kill cancer cells using your body's own immune system, potentially causing fewer side effects.

Haematologist: A doctor who specialises in the treatment of cancers affecting the blood or bone marrow, for example leukaemia or lymphoma.

Registrar: A doctor who is training to become a specialist and works very closely with an oncologist. Registrars usually work in the oncology or haematology team for several months. You will often meet the registrar in outpatient clinics and on the ward.

House surgeons: Doctors who are in their first years of employment after graduation. The doctors work in a variety of clinical areas to gain experience. You will meet house surgeons in the outpatient clinic and on the ward.

Trainee interns: Medical students in the last year of their training to become a doctor. They also work in clinics and hospital wards.

Other specialist doctors

Specialist doctors may be needed to get more information on how best to treat your cancer. Some examples of these are:

- **Breast surgeon** – for surgery involving your breast
- **Colo-rectal surgeon** – for surgery involving your bowel
- **Dermatologist** – a doctor who specialise in diseases of your skin.



- **Endocrinologist** – a doctor who specialise in diagnosing and treating disorders of your hormones.
- **Gastroenterologist** – a doctor who specialise in diseases of your digestive system.
- **Gynaecologist** – a doctor who specialise in diseases of women's reproductive system.
- **Head and neck surgeon** – a surgeon who specialise in diseases of the ears, nose, mouth, throat and neck.
- **Neurologist** – a doctor who specialise in disorders of your nervous system.
- **Neurosurgeon** – for surgery involving your brain or nervous system.
- **Orthopaedic surgeon** – for surgery on your bones
- **Plastic surgeon** – for surgery including skin grafting or reconstructive surgery.
- **Respiratory physician** – a doctor who specialises in diseases of the lung and your breathing.
- **Thoracic surgeon** – for surgery on your chest or lungs.
- **Urologist** – a doctor who specialise in diseases of the urinary tract of both males and females, and of the genital organs in males.

Sometimes you will see another specialist as well as your oncologist. The specialist and your oncologist will then talk about your treatment.

Nurses in your cancer care team

Nurses are trained to assess, monitor and report the symptoms and side effects of cancer and cancer treatments. Providing information and education on all aspects of cancer care is a key nursing role. Nurses are skilled listeners and provide practical and emotional care for people with cancer and their families.

Chemotherapy nurse: A nurse who gives chemotherapy prescribed by the medical oncologist. They provide education about treatment and monitor side effects.

Radiation nurse: A nurse who provides care to those undergoing radiation treatment. This usually involves giving medication, dressing wounds and monitoring side effects.

Cancer nurse co-ordinator: A nurse who acts as a point of contact to a patient across different parts of the health service. They support and guide patients and their families to keep them fully informed about their care.

Clinical nurse specialist: A nurse who has advanced skills within a specialty area or cancer type. You may see them alongside the doctor at hospital appointments and they are a good point of contact if you have questions about your cancer treatment.

Outpatient nurse: A nurse who works alongside doctors during their clinics at the hospital. **Ward nurse:** A nurse who looks after you during your stay in hospital.

Community-based nurse: A nurse who visits you in your home for extra support. To access them you need a referral from your GP or cancer team at the hospital.

Research nurse: If you are taking part in a clinical trial, you will meet the research nurse whose job it is to co-ordinate your care during the trial and keep your information about the trial.

Radiation therapists

You will meet radiation therapists if you are having radiation treatment. They plan your radiation treatment with your radiation oncologist, and they also give you your radiation treatment. Radiation therapists will provide education and monitor any side effects you have while you are undergoing this type of treatment.

Palliative care team

A team of specialist doctors and nurses who help to keep a person comfortable by managing symptoms such as pain, nausea or fatigue. They are not trying to cure your cancer, but help you have the best possible quality of life. They can help you at any stage of your cancer, from diagnosis to the end of life.

Oncology social workers and psychologists

Oncology social workers and psychologists are trained in support and counselling in a number of areas, such as:

- adjusting to illness and the resulting changes in lifestyle
- managing feelings of anxiety and depression
- assisting with relationships between family and friends
- reactions of loss and grief
- loneliness
- stress.

Oncology social workers can also help you with community resources, information and advice about:

- accommodation
- education
- employment
- family care arrangements
- finances
- managing at home.

Spiritual care and cultural support

You can ask your cancer care team if you would like to speak with spiritual care and cultural support workers, for example chaplains or Māori and Pacific health workers.

Dietitian

You may be referred to see a dietitian while undergoing treatment. A dietitian gives nutritional advice to those who are affected by cancer and the side effects that treatment may cause.

Speech language therapist

You may be referred to see a speech language therapist if your cancer and/or its treatment affects your speech or swallowing. They will help you maintain this function during and after treatment.

Pharmacist

Gives you advice on your medication and their side effects.

