

INTRODUCTION

While you undergo radiation therapy, a team of highly trained medical professionals will be working together to make sure you receive the best care possible.

RADIATION ONCOLOGISTS

Radiation oncologists are the doctors who will oversee your radiation therapy treatments. These physicians work with the other members of the radiation therapy team to develop your treatment plan and ensure that each treatment is given safely and accurately. Your radiation oncologist will also monitor your progress and adjust the treatment as necessary to make sure the radiation is hitting its target while minimizing side effects. Before, during and after your radiation therapy treatments, your radiation oncologist works closely with other cancer doctors such as **medical oncologists** and **surgeons** to maximize the radiation's effectiveness.

Radiation oncologists are the only physicians with the expertise and training to prescribe and deliver radiation therapy treatments. In addition to college and medical school, five years of additional training are required for radiation oncologists. Radiation oncologists receive extensive training in cancer medicine, in the safe use of radiation to treat disease and in managing any side effects caused by radiation. Once they pass an examination by the American Board of Radiology, radiation oncologists are board certified.

RADIATION THERAPISTS

Radiation therapists work with radiation oncologists to administer your daily radiation treatment under the doctor's prescription and supervision. They maintain your daily treatment records and regularly check the treatment machines to make sure they are working properly.

Radiation therapists go through a two- to four-year educational program following high school or college. By passing a special examination, radiation therapists may be certified by the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists. In addition, many states require radiation therapists to be licensed. For more information on radiation therapists, contact the American Society of Radiologic Technologists at www.asrt.org.

RADIATION ONCOLOGY NURSES

Radiation oncology nurses work together with your radiation oncologist and radiation therapists to care for you and your family during your radiation treatments. They will explain the possible side effects you may experience and describe how you can manage them. In addition, they assess how you are doing throughout treatment and will help you cope with any changes you may experience. They will also provide support and counseling to you and your family.

Radiation oncology nurses are licensed registered nurses or licensed practical nurses. Many registered nurses in radiation therapy have earned additional certification in the specialty of oncology nursing, and these nurses hold the O.C.N. (Oncology Certified Nurse) designation. Advanced practice nurses, including clinical nurse specialists and nurse practitioners, have completed a master's degree program. For more information on oncology nursing, contact the Oncology Nursing Society at www.ons.org or the ASTRO Nursing Committee at www.astro.org.

MEDICAL PHYSICISTS

Qualified medical physicists work directly with the radiation oncologist during treatment planning and delivery. They oversee the work of the dosimetrist and help ensure that complex treatments are properly tailored for each patient. Medical physicists are responsible for developing and directing quality control programs for equipment and procedures. Their responsibility also includes making sure

the equipment works properly by taking precise measurements of the radiation beam and performing other safety tests on a regular basis.

Medical physicists follow college with additional graduate training in medical physics to receive a master's or doctoral degree. In some cases, a medical physicist will complete a one- to two-year program at a hospital after receiving a graduate degree for more training. Medical physicists are often certified by the American Board of Radiology or the American Board of Medical Physics. For more information on medical physicists, contact the American Association of Physicists in Medicine at www.aapm.org.

DOSIMETRISTS

Dosimetrists carefully calculate the dose of radiation prescribed by your radiation oncologist to make sure the tumor gets the prescribed dosage. Using computers, they work to develop a number of treatment plans that can best destroy the tumor while sparing normal tissue. Since treatment plans are often very complex, dosimetrists work with your radiation oncologist and medical physicist to develop a treatment plan that is right for you.

Many dosimetrists start as radiation therapists and then, with intensive training, become dosimetrists. Others are graduates of one- to two-year dosimetry training programs. Dosimetrists are certified by the Medical Dosimetrist Certification Board. Contact the American Association of Medical Dosimetrists at www.medicaldosimetry.org for more information.

SOCIAL WORKERS

Social workers are available to provide a variety of supportive services to you and your family. They can provide counseling to help you and your family cope with the diagnosis of cancer and with your treatment. They may also help arrange for home healthcare, transportation, financial support, emotional support and other services.

NUTRITIONISTS/DIETITIANS

Nutritionists or dietitians will work with you to help you maintain a healthy diet during treatments. They will help you modify your eating plan if the side effects of treatment are affecting your appetite, help you identify what you can eat, and can provide recipes, menu suggestions and information on ready-to-use nutritional supplements. They also can address dietary issues and current developments that may affect cancer treatment outcomes.

DENTISTS

Dentists may be involved in your care if you are receiving radiation for cancers of the mouth, throat or neck. Dentists may recommend that you have preventive dental work prior to radiation, and they will also help you manage the oral effects of cancer therapy such as dry mouth or tooth or denture problems. A dental hygienist may also assist in performing these services under the supervision of a dentist.

PHYSICAL THERAPISTS

Physical therapists use therapeutic exercises to ensure that your body functions properly while you are undergoing treatment. These exercises are used to help manage side effects, alleviate pain and keep you healthy.

PATIENT NAVIGATOR

A patient navigator is a social worker, nurse or other knowledgeable individual who can assist you in finding your way within the complex healthcare system. Patient navigators know who to call and where to go so your care may be most efficiently provided.

