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. Radiation oncologists must pass an examination by the American Board of Radiology to become board certified.

Radiation Therapists
Radiation therapists work under the supervision of the radiation oncologist to deliver radiation treatments. 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 therapy treatments. They will explain the possible side effects you may experience and describe how you can manage them. In addition, they assist you with managing any side effects caused by treatment. Radiation oncology nurses have completed a master’s degree in oncology nursing, and these nurses hold the Oncology Certified Nurse designation. Advanced practice nurses, including certified nurse practitioners, have completed a master’s degree program. For more information on oncology nursing, contact the Oncology Nursing Society at www.onn.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 implement your daily radiation treatment. 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 may be certified by the American Board of Radiology or in 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 use treatment planning computers to generate the radiation plan prescribed by your radiation oncologist to treat your cancer. Since treatment plans are often very complex, dosimetrists work closely with your radiation oncologist and medical physicists 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 Dosimetry Certification Board. Contact the American Association of Medical Dosimetrists at www.medicaldosimetry.org for more information.

Dental Hygienists
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.

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 health care, 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 radiation 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.

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 health care system. Patient navigators know who to call and where to go so your care may be most efficiently provided.
TARGETING CANCER CARE

ABOUT THE RADIATION ONCOLOGY TEAM
For information on what each of the radiation oncology team does or to locate a radiation oncologist near you, visit www.rtanswers.org.

ABOUT ASTRO
The American Society for Radiation Oncology is the largest radiation oncology society in the world with more than 10,000 members who specialize in treating cancer with radiation therapies. ASTRO is dedicated to improving patient care through education, clinical practice, advancement of science and advocacy.

LOCATE A CANCER SPECIALIST
If you or a family member has been diagnosed with cancer, it’s important to meet with several cancer specialists, including a radiation oncologist. They will help you decide on the cancer treatment or treatments that work best for you, your cancer and your lifestyle. To find a radiation oncologist in your area, visit www.rtanswers.org.

CARING FOR YOURSELF

NOTES/QUESTIONS FOR YOUR DOCTOR

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While you undergo radiation therapy, a team of highly trained medical professionals will be working together to make sure you receive the best possible care. Radiation oncologists are the doctors who oversee the care of each person undergoing radiation treatment. Other members of the treatment team include radiation therapists, radiation oncology nurses, medical physicists, dosimetrist, social workers and nutritionists.