

When it comes to **fighting cancer**, these professionals each play an important role in your care

DREAM TEAM

Each athlete on a team must perform superbly in his position to secure a win. Each actor of an ensemble cast plays a role in wowing audiences. Every employee needs to be in the right job for a company to excel. Whether it's a playing field, a stage or an office, teamwork is everything. It's also critical in cancer care.

WHY BUILD A TEAM?

"Nobody knows everything, and nobody can do everything," says Ted Gansler, M.D., director of medical content for the American Cancer Society. That's why it's important to bring together professionals from multiple disciplines.

For simpler cases of cancer, such as an early stage skin cancer, you might need one doctor—in this case, your dermatologist. But when cancer is more complicated, more people get involved. These professionals might include a primary care doctor, radiation oncologist, medical oncologist and surgeon. And when that happens, it's important that they function as a team.

"You want everyone on the same page," says Mark Fesen, M.D., author of *Surviving the Cancer System: An Empowering Guide to Taking Control of Your Care*. "You don't want chemotherapy drugs interfering with radiation treatments, for example. Or depending on which chemotherapy drug you're on, your blood pressure could go up and down. Sometimes, we might send the patient to their primary care physician, who can stay involved and help us monitor those things."

MEET THE PLAYERS

Your team will depend on your specific diagnosis and needs. Here's a roster of the professionals you're most likely to work with on your road to beating cancer, the order of which is determined on a case-by-case basis.

PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN.

Your regular doctor is often the first person you tell about troubling symptoms or who sees an abnormality in a routine screening. He or she also will help monitor your health during treatment and manage any long-term side effects afterward.

MEDICAL ONCOLOGIST.

"Medical oncologists prescribe medication for cancer," Gansler says. Most often this refers to chemotherapy drugs, although targeted drug therapies for cancer—which work mainly on cancer cells instead of also affecting the surrounding healthy cells—are evolving, he adds.

SURGEON.

For the removal of some tumors, a general surgeon will be part of your team. For others, you might have a specialist, such as a thoracic surgeon for lung cancers.

RADIATION ONCOLOGIST.

This doctor will create a plan for using radiation to destroy cancer cells. Two-thirds of cancer patients receive radiation therapy, according to the American Society for Radiation Oncology.

SOCIAL WORKER.

Like therapists, oncology social workers can help you understand the psychological and social effects of cancer. They also can connect you to various services—support groups, community programs or even pharmaceutical grant programs.

THERAPIST/ PSYCHOLOGIST.

You may see a counselor to help you cope with the social and psychological challenges of dealing with cancer. "Some degree of psychological distress is very, very common among people with cancer," he adds. "People should never be reluctant to get that care."

DIETITIAN.

Depending on your treatment, you might need a special diet. "Rather intensive chemotherapy or radiation can cause mouth sores that make it difficult for the patient to eat," Gansler explains. "So, a registered dietitian might help them find ways to get their nutrition."



SUPPORTING PLAYERS.

Don't forget the team of professionals supporting your doctor—and ultimately, supporting you. Anesthesiologists, nurses, radiation therapists and others help ensure you get the best care possible.

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

Never forget that you are the most important person in this process.

At the end of the day, you choose your treatment and how aggressive it will be, Fesen says. That's why it's important to understand the options your doctors present, and to know and trust your team.

"Make sure everyone on your team is on the same page and in agreement," Gansler advises. "Make sure your team is taking care of your medical, social and psychological needs." ❏

A PLAYBOOK FOR PATIENTS

Instead of sitting on the sidelines, take an active role in your cancer care. Here's how.

Ask questions. If your doctor is using words you don't know, speak up, says Mark Fesen, M.D., author of *Surviving the Cancer System: An Empowering Guide to Taking Control of Your Care*.

Tape the conversation. Fesen advises bringing a recorder so you can listen to it later or play it for a family member.

Practice active listening. Repeat everything your doctor says to make sure you understand.

Bring a loved one. A family member can offer doctors additional insight and help you make important decisions.

Advocate for yourself. "If you're unhappy with the care you're receiving, you shouldn't hesitate to get a second opinion," says Ted Gansler, M.D., director of medical content for the American Cancer Society.

CHOOSE A CANCER TREATMENT PATH



If you or a loved one is diagnosed with cancer, there's a good chance you'll face decisions about treatment. The American Cancer Society offers information about the usual treatment of various cancers, including interactive NexProfiler Treatment Option Tools to help you make decisions. **Visit cancer.org**, then select "Treatment Decision Tools" under "Find It Fast."