

Getting a SECOND OPINION

Whether a recent diagnosis means you're facing chemo, surgery or any other course of treatment, it's natural to want to seek a second opinion. But if you're not sure how to go about it, follow these six steps:

□ Let your doctor know.

Don't worry—he won't be upset! In fact, he's likely to support your decision. Input from another physician helps ensure you get the best care possible. Simply say, "Doctor, I'm sure you understand that I'd like to talk to another physician about my condition. I just wanted you to be aware and wonder how you'd like me to follow up." You could even go one step further and ask him for a referral.

□ Search for your new doctor.

If your doctor can't suggest someone, ask friends and family to recommend someone. Your insurance company may provide a list of in-network doctors in your area to help you narrow your search, or you can visit the American Board of Medical Specialties' website at www.abms.org to find a board-certified specialist in any field.

□ Narrow your choices.

Once you've compiled a few names, call to make sure the doctors are taking new patients, how long you'll have to wait for an appointment and if the doctor accepts your insurance, then set up an appointment with the doctor who is the best fit.

Tip: Found a specialist who only accepts referrals? Tell your primary doctor to write one up for you—then ask the doctor's front desk to call and fax the referral form for the appointment.

□ Get your records.

Ask your primary doctor and oncologist for your medical records and copies of any test results. Sending (or delivering) them yourself is the best way to make sure they get there in time for your consultation.

Tip: Aim to get them there about a week before your visit to give the doctor enough time to become familiar with your case. If you're not able to deliver it personally, fax the records and follow up with a call to ensure they arrived as intended. (Don't rely on the fax confirmation alone.)

□ Ask about pathology slides.

The doctor will need to see any x-rays you have had done as part of your cancer work up. It is also common that the physician will need the pathology department where he works to re-review your pathology slides. Ask if the doctor will want these sent in advance of your consultation or if you can just bring them with you.

□ Treat your second opinion like a regular appointment.

Now that you're at your consultation, be prepared to discuss all of your questions about your diagnosis and its recommended treatment, just as you did with your initial doctor. Request that the doctor go over your records and test results with you. Your second doctor may also ask that new or additional tests be run. In some cases, your second opinion consultation may actually be what is referred to as a multidisciplinary consultation. This means that a team of cancer specialists will meet with you on the same day. These individuals usually include a radiation oncologist, medical oncologist and possibly a plastic surgeon.

Use the lines below for notes:
