

29. Questions about my Treatment

Receiving a diagnosis of cancer can be a very worrying and distressing time, and this makes it a particularly difficult time in which to take in any information beyond the fact of the diagnosis. Yet most patients have lots of questions about their cancer and its treatment that may emerge at different times. There is no one time point at which information should be given or received; it should be freely available whenever patients feel they need it. Some people prefer not to learn a great deal about their illness or its treatment and their views must be respected. Although doctors and other medical staff have a professional duty to answer truthfully any questions patients may have, they may not always know the answers.

How can I ensure that my questions are answered?

- Raise any concerns as early as you feel comfortable with a member of your Healthcare Team
- You should always have exactly as much information as you feel you want and your medical team will always be happy to provide it. Of course, it's important to remember that only you know *when* and *how much* new information you are ready to have. Cancer and its treatment is often very complicated and it can take a long time to understand everything about it.
- It is often well worth writing down your questions before you attend your appointment, because it can be easy to forget one's questions during the stress of a hospital appointment.
- You have every right to ask any member of the medical team questions about your cancer or its treatment. Healthcare professionals may not offer you information unless you ask it, but they should be routinely asking you if you have any questions. So if you do have a question please ask. All questions are important and should be answered fully, though remember that not all questions have clear answers. Doctors sometimes simply don't know something, but if this is the case they should tell you so.
- Do not be put off asking a question because you think that your question is a silly one or you are repeating a question you have asked before. It can take time to understand fully what you have been told.
- Never feel embarrassed or shy about asking for clarification. If the response to your question is not satisfactory then please let the member of staff know so that they can either try explaining again. When in doubt, try repeating back what you have been told you and ask if you've got it right. You can also ask about recommended reading materials about your condition or its treatment.
- If you have a question that requires some privacy, please let the member of staff know.
- The Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre at your local cancer centre will have plenty of leaflets and booklets that you may find useful. Furthermore, the staff that work in these centres will do their best to answer your questions.
- Further sources of information are available, such as Macmillan Cancer Support, Marie Curie Cancer Care and CancerHelp UK etc.