

# Communicating with Your Health Care Team

*Good communication can help you get the best care and have a better treatment experience.*

By Mia James



**Good communication between you and your health care team should be a two-way street: you should feel comfortable communicating your concerns and questions, and your providers should explain the diagnosis and treatment plan in ways that you understand.**

“Great communication is necessary between patients and their health care team,” says Sahirah Khabeer, a patient resource navigator with the American Cancer Society and the Grady Health System at the Georgia Cancer Center for Excellence. “Patients have to be aware—specifically in the area of cancer—of what their diagnosis is, what the treatment plan is, and what to expect.”

Open dialogue between you and your health care team can contribute to your choosing and staying on an appropriate treatment plan and can also affect your quality of life. “I think good communication can improve a patient’s overall experience,” Sahirah says, as providers are better able to help patients who voice their concerns.

Though communication during cancer treat-

ment can be challenging, there are steps you can take to keep the dialogue open and ensure that information is received and understood on both sides.

Sahirah recommends asking your team some specific questions before treatment begins:

- What is the type and stage of the diagnosis?
- What is my treatment plan?
- How long is treatment expected to last?
- What are the potential side effects?
- What’s my prognosis?
- In addition to my doctor, whom can I ask if I have questions?
- Whom should I call in case of an emergency?

## Tips for Keeping the Conversation Going

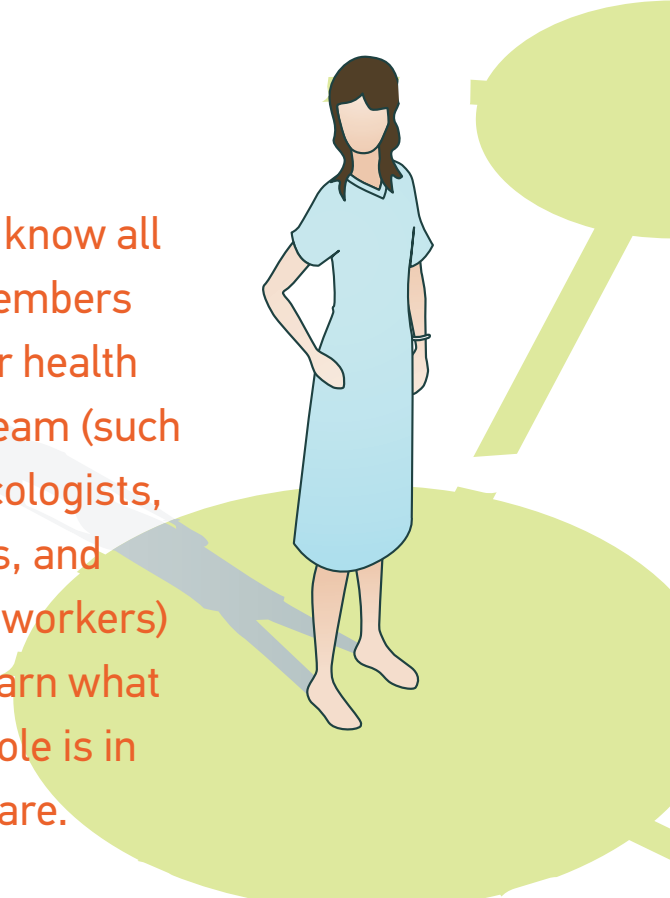
Even with questions prepared, you may find it difficult to keep track of the information you need to receive and share. Here are some tips to keep the dialogue open:

- Get to know all the members of your health care team (such as oncologists, nurses, and social workers) and learn what their role is in your care.
- Write down questions before appointments and take notes during appointments.
- Consider keeping a detailed journal of how you feel during treatment and write down any side effects.
- Create a file for all printed materials related to your diagnosis so that you can easily look up information.
- Have a friend come with you to appointments to help you remember important information, ask questions, and take notes.
- If you don't understand something your doctor says, be sure to ask for a clearer explanation.
- Ask your health care team to recommend educational resources, such as websites and books.

## For More Help

If your circumstances make good communication particularly challenging, a patient navigator like Sahirah can help you establish and maintain an open dialogue with your health care team. “My role as a patient navigator is to provide direction, resources, and services to all cancer patients as they're going through their journey,” she says.

In addition to ensuring that all necessary information is shared, a navigator can help you find patient-friendly literature about diagnosis and treatment and make sure you're receiving needed information in a way that you can understand. A



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navigator can also connect you with important resources (such as financial, insurance, and medication assistance) and, no less significant, offer caring and compassionate support.

## Keep Talking

As you enter the treatment process, remember that good communication between you and your health care team can help you achieve the best outcome possible. And remember that there are steps you can take to ensure good communication as well as trained professionals (patient navigators) to help you on your journey. **cfThrive**

*To learn more about patient navigators, visit the American Cancer Society at [cancer.org](http://cancer.org).*