

Facing Cancer: Getting a Second Opinion

If you or a family members have recently been diagnosed with a complex cancer, it's important to consider all of your options. Perhaps you feel uncertain about the diagnosis you received or your doctor's treatment recommendation. According to Dr. John Brems, general surgeon with Advocate Medical Group in Elgin, Ill., a second opinion may be a valuable next step.

"If you received a diagnosis for a complex cancer and have been advised to undergo a major surgery or therapy, then I think a second opinion is very important," Dr. Brems says. "You want to hear the different treatments available in order to make a wise, informed decision and ultimately choose the best option for you."

Even if you are satisfied with your primary cancer specialist, a second opinion is recommended for complex cancers, agrees Dr. C. Yeshwant, medical oncologist on the medical staff at Advocate Sherman Hospital in Elgin, Ill. "Consider a physician who specializes in your type of cancer, as he or she may bring different treatment options to light," Dr. Yeshwant says. "A second opinion will also make you aware of all the available treatment options, which are continually changing with medical advances."

If you would like to explore another doctor's advice, here are some suggestions:

- Let your doctor know you're interested in a second opinion. *Don't worry about causing offense.* Most doctors welcome your interest in your health.
- Ask your current doctor how to get copies of your test results and any X-rays you have had. You'll want to share these with the other doctor when you've made your appointment. Keep a copy of your medical records, including your diagnosis and treatment plan.
- Bring along family members to ensure everyone understands the diagnosis and treatment options. Also, be sure to take notes and ask questions.

Get a second opinion as soon as possible after receiving an initial complex cancer diagnosis. This should take place within the next week or two after receiving your primary opinion. "With a serious diagnosis, time is of the essence to begin your treatment for the most successful outcome," Dr. Brems says.

Dear God, help me be mindful of those who struggle with cancer. Help me be present to them and their families. Amen.

How your congregation can help people with cancer

People who are living with cancer, along with their families, often need support from their faith communities. It's important to communicate with cancer patients and their families so that your congregation understands what kind of help is most needed and desired. If your congregation has a parish nurse or a pastoral care coordinator, he or she can work with the congregation member and his or her family to develop a care plan.

Here are some ideas for your congregation:

- Offer transportation to treatment appointments. Many people with cancer must undergo repeated chemotherapy and radiation treatments and may need transportation to and from the hospital.
- Provide child care. If the cancer patient has children, babysitting or driving the kids to school and activities can be a huge help.
- Help with household chores. Many people who are undergoing cancer treatment struggle with exhaustion. Helping with household chores (or providing the funds to hire a cleaning service) can help keep the cancer patient's home in good order and frees up time for rest.
- Be supportive. The emotional impact of living with cancer or caring for someone with the disease can be immense. Spending time with patients and their families, offering prayer and being available for emotional support is incredibly important.

In addition to providing direct support to patients, congregations can also join the fight against cancer:

- Educate members about cancer. Share information about types of cancer, symptoms, prevention and diagnosis. Representatives of cancer awareness groups are often available to offer in-person presentations at houses of worship.
- Participate in local fundraising and awareness programs. Many organizations promote events, such as walks, runs and benefit dinners. Your faith community can help support these events through financial contributions as well as volunteer efforts.

Resources: [Advocate Health Care: Advocatehealth.com](http://AdvocateHealthCare.com), [National Cancer Institute: Cancer.gov](http://NationalCancerInstitute.gov), [American Cancer Society: Cancer.org](http://AmericanCancerSociety.org)

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