



“Doctor, Can We Talk?”

Tips for Communicating with Your Health Care Team

Talking to your doctor can be difficult. No matter what your diagnosis, simply hearing about it can leave you feeling frightened or overwhelmed. Good communication with your doctor can help improve the quality of care you receive.

Remember: YOU ARE THE CONSUMER

As a patient, it is important to remember that you are a consumer of health care. The way to begin making difficult decisions about health care is to educate yourself.

Here are some tips that will help you talk to your doctor:

- **Bring someone with you.** It is a good idea to bring someone with you when you have an appointment. It is always helpful to have support, a second set of ears, and another person to think of questions.
- **Write out a list of questions beforehand.** A list will help you remember important questions. Make them specific and brief because your doctor has limited time. Ask your most important questions first.
- **Write down the answers you get.** Writing down answers will help you remember your doctor’s responses and instructions, and you can go over the information later when you have time to research and concentrate.
- **If possible, bring a tape recorder.** It is OK to ask your doctor if you can record your visit. Taping is helpful because you may want to hear a reassurance or diagnosis again, or share it with friends and family.

Saying and Hearing: CancerCare’s Tips for Understanding Your Doctor

- When you are talking to your doctor, **use "I" statements.** For example, the phrase "I don't understand..." is much more effective than "You're being unclear about..."
- Also, don't be afraid to be assertive. If you don't know what a word means, **ask about it.** Remember to make your questions specific and brief. If there is something you can't understand or resolve, ask your doctor if there is some other time that you can discuss it in more detail.
- Finally, if something seems confusing to you, try to **repeat it** back to your doctor. For example, "You mean I should..." If you think you will understand better with pictures, ask to see x-rays, slides, or have the doctor draw a diagram.

Questions That Can Help in Cancer Treatment and Follow-Up

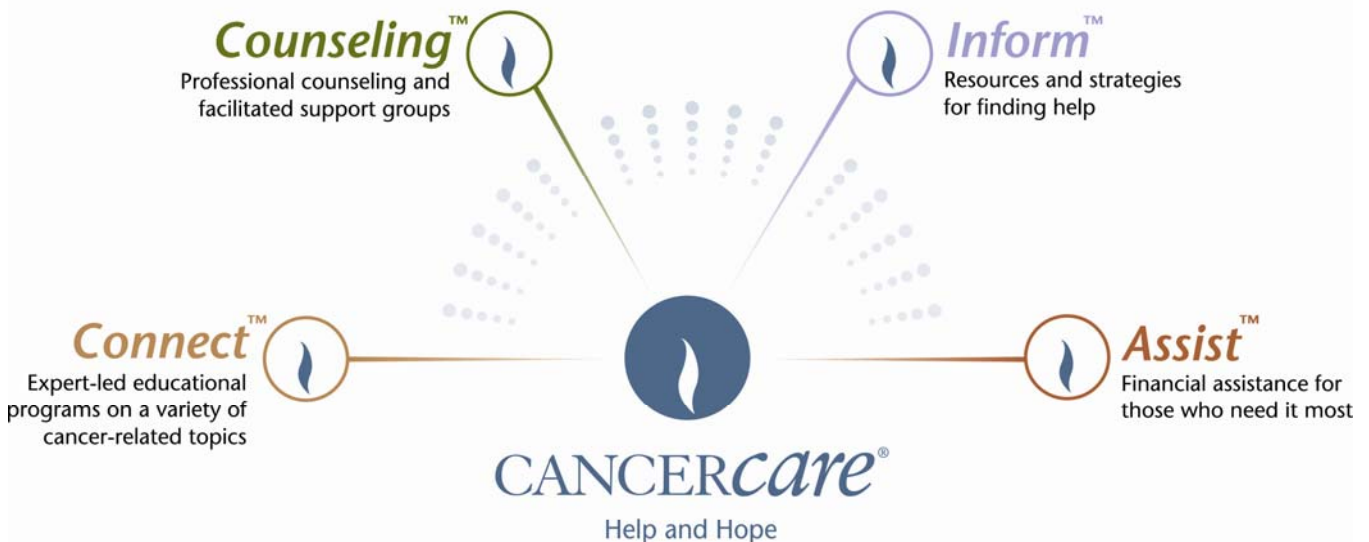
Here are some questions that you may want to ask your doctor or nurse to help you understand your treatment and follow-up:

- What are my treatment options? What is the recommended treatment?
- How often will I receive treatment? What are the side effects?
- What are the benefits vs. the risks?
- How much will it cost?
- If I have questions during my treatment, and my doctor is not available, who can I ask? (Nurse? Social worker? Other specialist?)
- Is there anything else I should know? Is there anything I can read about this?

CancerCare Can Help

CancerCare's staff of professional oncology social workers can help you address individual issues you may have when communicating with your doctor. We understand the importance of this relationship, and our social workers can offer you detailed advice on the telephone, online, or in person to help you foster the best possible relationship with your health care team. CancerCare also offers education, information and referrals to other resources that can help you improve communication with your health care team.

The *CANCERcare*® Constellation of Services



CancerCare's services are provided free of charge to anyone affected by cancer

1-800-813-HOPE (4673) • www.cancercares.org

National Office / 275 Seventh Avenue / New York, NY 10001

© CancerCare 2005