

*I Have Cancer,
What Do I Do Now?*



Cancer Association
of Havasu

The Cancer Association of Havasu

Havasu Community Health Foundation

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Dear Friends

"You have cancer."

Those three words can stun you and leave you breathless. You may have walked out of your doctor's office confused and not knowing where to turn next. The Cancer Association of Havasu wants to support you and help you work through the next steps. We have compiled information that will answer some questions and guide you through what you may encounter in the time to come.

Remember, every person's journey through cancer is different. The type of cancer, where it is located, how advanced it is when found and your general health all influence your course of treatment. So, what is found in these pages is not a set of hard and fast rules but rather guidelines to point you in the right direction.

We care about you; you are not alone.

The Cancer Association of Havasu



Diagnosis

Find out everything you can about the type of cancer you have. You are your own best advocate and you want to make informed decisions. Do your research through every resource available to you. Ask your doctors and nurses questions. Ask for literature from your doctor's office, the Cancer Care Center, and the library. Search online. The internet can give you access to good information, *but be cautious*. Keep in mind that there are dishonest people who willingly take advantage of people in this crisis. They distribute false information and false hope in so-called miracle cures just to make money.

Always discuss what you find with your doctor. Even a good treatment, supplement or practice can interfere with your prescribed treatments. Let your doctor know before you start anything new.

Be careful not to overwhelm yourself with information. Take your research one step at a time as you progress through your treatment and recovery.

You will find a list of reliable online resources in the back of the book.

Having courage does not mean that we are unafraid. Having courage and showing courage mean we face our fears. We are able to say, "I have fallen but I will get up." Maya Angelou

Choosing a Doctor

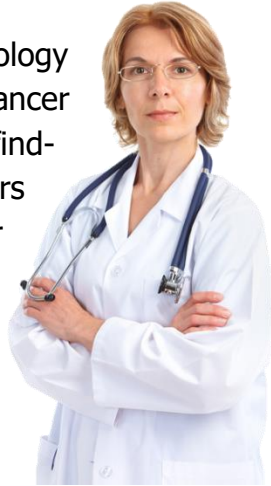
In most cases your primary care physician or family doctor will refer you to an oncologist. A few cancers can be treated by other specialists. For example, basal cell skin cancers can be surgically removed by your dermatologist; certain thyroid tumors are better treated by thyroid specialists¹. Discuss with your doctor who is the best specialist for your type of cancer.

You want to choose a doctor and hospital or treatment facility that is the best for you. Do you have the money and desire to travel, perhaps across the country, to utilize a top rated facility? Or, is it important to you to stay close to home? Feeling good about your cancer care is an important factor in your treatment and recovery. At the 2016 Cancer Symposium, Dr. Gregory Yang of Yuma Regional Medical Center stated that hospitals in Arizona are becoming known for cutting edge research and develop in cancer treatments. Dr. Yang also noted that Arizona hospitals are increasingly working together to obtain the best care for their patients – even if it means referring them to another facility.

What *personal qualities* in a doctor are important to you? Think about what will make you feel the most comfortable. Will it bother you if your doctor is very matter of fact and doesn't spend a lot of extra time explaining things to you? Some people prefer that because they don't want to feel overwhelmed with information, others want to know all the details. The point is to find a doctor with whom you feel at ease.

When this connection is there, your treatment will progress more smoothly and you will have more confidence in the plan laid out by your doctor.

The American Society of Clinical Oncology has a searchable database of cancer doctors. Go to www.cancer.net/find-cancer-doctor to find a list of doctors in your area. Associations for specific cancers will have lists of expert doctors on their websites also.



Obtaining a second opinion regarding your diagnosis, prognosis and treatment plan is not an unreasonable request. Your doctor should not make you feel bad for asking for another opinion. There are hundreds of different cancers and each can turn up in more than one spot in your body. Advances in treatments are continually be made. This makes cancer treatment complicated and always changing. Different doctors are likely to have different philosophies and approaches. A second opinion can help you feel more confident in your treatment plan. The R.A. Bloch Cancer Foundation provides a list of second-opinion centers free of charge, call 800-433-0464. The list may also be found online at: <http://blohcancer.org/resources/multidisciplinary-second-opinion-centers/>

Medical Visits

Here are some tips to help you through your medical visits.

- Bring a friend, a notebook or tape recorder. With so much information coming your way, it is hard to remember everything. The best solution is to bring a friend for support and to help you remember. If no one is available, take a notebook or tape recorder so you can review what was said and be sure not to miss anything.
- Start a notebook or binder to coordinate appointments, doctor's phone numbers and the information you collect along the way – test results, medications, treatment options etc. Having everything in one place will help you at the next visit.
- Keep a list of questions you want to ask. As you review your notes from each visit, or do research, jot down your questions so you will have them recorded in one place, ready to ask at your next visit.
- Ask for the doctor's findings, prognosis and treatment plan in writing. This will let you know exactly what he/she said and help with research or obtaining a second opinion
- Do not withhold information from your doctor. Prior medical history, changes in lifestyle, nutritional supplements and any alternative treatments you may try can affect your primary treatment plan. Your doctor needs to know about these things even if they seem minor or unimportant.

- Also, don't hesitate to talk about any issues that may arise with the staff. There may be job training that needs to be done, or the doctor may be able to straighten out any misunderstandings. You don't want to be uncomfortable with the staff because this may lead to being less open with your doctor.

Organizing Your Paperwork

As mentioned before, it is a good idea to create a medical binder or folder to keep all your information together, and take it with you to all your appointments.

There are sample forms in the folder and available to download from our webpage: www.havasucommunityhealth.org/page/cancerassociation

Developing a Treatment Plan

When deciding how to treat your cancer, a friend's suggestion about what worked for them is not enough. Even if you and your friend have the same type of cancer, it will manifest itself in different ways. Treatments vary with the type of cancer and these variables make your situation unique. So, you may start with a friend's suggestion, but do your research, talk with your doctor, and be open to what he tells you. What is considered the best treatment is continually evolving as medical advances are made. The treatment which worked best five years ago may no longer be the best course of action.

When developing a treatment plan, ask your doctor:

- What will likely happen without treatment?
- What treatment options are there?
- What is the expected outcome of each treatment?
- What are the side effects of each treatment?

Then, compare the outcomes. For example, the doctor's statement that treatment will increase survival by 50% sounds great. But if 50% means increasing life from 8 weeks to 12 weeks, and those remaining weeks are spent vomiting and battling nausea, weakness and fatigue, maybe you haven't gained much.

Treatment Options

Find out what you need to know about the most common types of cancer treatment, such as surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and many others. Learn how they work and why they are used, and get an idea of what to expect and how they might affect you if you're getting them.² Read more about each of these options on the American Cancer Society website: cancer.org.

Dealing with Side Effects

Note that every treatment option does not necessarily have side effects. When they do, most are predictable. Your doctor can outline a plan to prevent many side effects and lessen the impact of others. *Helping you cope with them should be a focus of your doctor.*

The Cancer Association of Havasu has support groups available to help when you are ready and Queasy Pops to help with nausea.

If your treatment results in hair loss, wigs, hats & scarves are also available thru the Cancer Association of Havasu.

Role of Family and Friends

Friends and family can be overwhelming with their concerns and advice. At times you may want to run and hide. Remember that friends and family are crucial to survival. Many studies have found a connection between cancer survival and social contacts/support.

Take Care of You

- Try to keep life as normal as possible
- Exercise as much as you can, even short walks and stretching will help
- Learn to accept help – As Fincannon puts it, “you have cancer – milk it!” Share responsibilities for things like child or elder care and housework.
- Get emotional support. Seek professional help for depression or anxiety. But, in the least look for a good support group. Friends from church or social clubs can fill the need if they will take the time to listen and be encouraging.
- Stay positive. The Mayo Clinic has the following to say about the health benefits of being positive.
“Researchers continue to explore the effects of

positive thinking and optimism on health. Health benefits that positive thinking may provide include:

- Increased life span
- Lower rates of depression
- Lower levels of distress
- Greater resistance to the common cold
- Better psychological and physical well-being
- Better cardiovascular health and reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease
- Better coping skills during hardships and times of stress

It's unclear why people who engage in positive thinking experience these health benefits. One theory is that having a positive outlook enables you to cope better with stressful situations, which reduces the harmful health effects of stress on your body."

People on Your Team

The following description of people on your oncology team was found on the cancer.net website.³

Oncologist – a doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating cancer. The oncologist oversees your care throughout the course of the disease.

Oncology Nurse – an oncology nurse will serve many roles depending on experience and education. These may include giving a physical exam, giving chemotherapy or other medications, identifying your needs, coordinating care with other members of the oncology team, educating

and counseling patients and families, or conducting research (as part of a clinical trial).

Oncology Nurse Practitioner (NP) – NPs meet with patients independently while collaborating with the oncology team. Their duties include duties of an Oncology Nurse in addition they may evaluate a person's health, diagnose and treat certain conditions, recommend diagnostic and lab tests and read the results, prescribe medications, perform certain procedures.

Patient Navigator – This individual guides patients from diagnosis through survivorship, and serves as a resource for counseling, financial and other support services. Patient navigators can be nurses, social workers or volunteers.

Palliative Care Doctors and Nurses – The palliative care team works closely with the other oncology team members to prevent and treat symptoms of cancer and treatment. A palliative care doctor is especially helpful if a patient is still experiencing pain and other symptoms of cancer despite treatment for these symptoms.

Physician Assistant (PA) – A PA works with a doctor delivering a broad range of services. Their responsibilities may include performing physical exams, Recommending diagnostic and lab tests and reading the results, helping with surgery, managing cancer and treatment side effects, prescribing medication and giving chemotherapy, educating and counseling patients and family about cancer and performing certain procedures.

Oncology Social Worker – An oncology social worker can help patients cope with cancer and the challenges the disease brings. This may include leading support groups, providing counseling, or helping patients find financial support and other resources.

Pathologist – A pathologist is a medical doctor who specializes in looking at cells, tissues, and organs to diagnose disease. It is most likely that you will never meet your pathologist. However, your pathologist plays an important role in determining the type of cancer you have. The responsibilities may include; determining the results of tests done on tissue samples, providing the final diagnosis of cancer and working directly with the treating doctors.

Registered Dietician (RD) – An RD provides education on eating well and provides recommendations to help people with cancer cope with dietary needs. In hospitals and other health care facilities, the dietitian provides medical nutrition therapy.

Diagnostic Radiologist – A radiologist is a medical doctor specialized in using imaging tests to help diagnose disease. The responsibilities of a diagnostic radiologist include reviewing and interpreting the results of imaging tests.

Rehabilitation Therapist – such as physical, occupational, speech, or recreational therapists. These professionals help people with cancer return to their highest level of independence. For example, they can help people with brain tumors regain speech and

independence or help women with breast cancer learn exercises to regain strength after a mastectomy.

Chaplain or other religious support. A chaplain offers spiritual support and rituals for patients and their families. These professionals may also lead support groups. Most hospitals have clergy on staff that work with people of all faiths.

Online Resources

chemocare.com look up chemo drugs and how to manage side effects.

cancer.gov The National Cancer Institute is a part of the National Institute of Health. You will find many articles and resources on this site.

nccn.org/patients The National Comprehensive Cancer Network is a vast website for medical professionals as well as patients. If you land on the main page, look for the menu bar item on the far right called "patient resources".

Support Groups

General Cancer Support Group Facilitated by Amie Morris, the Cancer Support Group is open to anyone whose life has been touched by a diagnosis of cancer is welcome to attend. You will be both inspired and

informed by the guest speakers and fellow attendees who know what you are experiencing.

Men's Cancer Support Group This group is designed to meet the unique needs of men and provides a genuine, free-flowing sharing of information and allows the bonds of friendship to develop. All men, whether long-term cancer survivors or recently diagnosed, are encouraged to attend.

Bosom Buddies Support Group Bosom Buddies is a support group for Breast Cancer Survivors. The members hope to raise awareness of the importance of annual mammograms in detecting breast cancer early. Early detection is the best protection - these ladies know this all too well and want to share that knowledge with their sisters - and brothers! Not nearly enough people know men can also have breast cancer!

End Notes

¹ Mayo Clinic Staff, Cancer Diagnosis? Advice for dealing with what comes next. Mayo Clinic, <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/cancer/in-depth/cancer-diagnosis/art-20046527>, (June 1, 2018)

² American Cancer Society Website, <http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/treatmenttypes/index> (June 1, 2018)

³ <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/cancer-basics/cancer-care-team/oncology-team> (May 25, 2016)

Courage does not
always roar.

Sometimes it's the quiet voice
at the end of the day saying,

I will try again tomorrow.



The Cancer Association of Havasu is a
program under the umbrella of
Havasu Community Health
Foundation, a
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