
Brain Tumors: Team Members and Common Terms

You are being treated for a brain tumor. During this time, you will have a team of healthcare providers caring for you. The members of this team will work with you and your family. They'll help you understand what's happening and guide you through your treatment choices. They will address your questions and concerns. Here is a list of who may be on your healthcare team. Below it, you will also find a list of words you might hear as you learn about brain tumors.

Members of your healthcare team

- **Case manager.** A case manager may be a nurse or social worker. They help you navigate the complex medical system. They often help connect patients to health system or community resources. They may also help you work with your insurance company.
- **Endocrinologist.** This is a healthcare provider who treats diseases related to the glands that make and release hormones. These glands include the thyroid, pineal, adrenal, and pituitary glands.
- **Interns, residents, and fellows.** These are healthcare providers in training. They can prescribe medicine. But they often work with more experienced healthcare providers called attending healthcare providers.
- **Medical oncologist.** This is a healthcare provider who diagnoses cancer and treats it with chemotherapy and other medicines.
- **Neurologist.** This is a healthcare provider who diagnoses and treats diseases of the nervous system, including the brain and spinal cord.
- **Neuro-oncologist.** This is a healthcare provider who treats tumors of the nervous system. Neuro-oncologists may have training in neurology, medical oncology, neurosurgery, pathology, or radiology.
- **Neurosurgeon.** This is a surgeon who operates on the brain, spine, and nerves.
- **Nurse.** This is a healthcare provider who cares for, teaches, and supports patients and families.
- **Nurse practitioner or clinical nurse specialist.** This is a nurse with special training. The nurse may work with the doctor to manage a patient's symptoms, adjust medicines, and examine patients. They can often prescribe medicines.
- **Physical, occupational, and speech therapists.** These are specialists who help patients work on their mobility, strength, and motor skills. They help patients relearn daily tasks, such as language and swallowing skills.
- **Physician assistant (PA).** These are healthcare providers who help doctors care for you. They can also prescribe medicine.
- **Radiation oncologist.** This is a healthcare provider who uses radiation to treat cancer.

- **Radiation therapist.** These specialists help you get ready for radiation therapy and then operate the machine to give you radiation treatments.
- **Social workers.** These are healthcare providers who have special training in dealing with the social, emotional, and other problems that may come with illness or disability. Social workers help to connect patients and families with resources and support outside the hospital.

Words you may hear during treatment

- **Benign.** This means it's not cancer. It can also mean it doesn't spread to other parts of the brain or body.
- **Biomarkers.** A molecule found in the body that is a sign of a condition or disease. Biomarkers can indicate how a tumor will respond to treatment.
- **Biopsy.** A small piece of tissue that is removed to see if it contains cancer cells.
- **Central nervous system (CNS).** This is the brain and spinal cord.
- **Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF).** This clear liquid surrounds, cushions, and supports the brain and spinal cord.
- **Chemotherapy.** This is a treatment for cancer using medicines.
- **Immunotherapy.** This is a cancer treatment that uses the immune system to fight a tumor.
- **Intracranial pressure (ICP).** This is the pressure inside the head or skull. Pressure is often increased in brain tumor patients.
- **Malignant.** This means cancer. It can also mean the tumor is fast-growing and can spread to other parts of the brain or spinal cord.
- **Metastatic (or secondary).** This refers to a tumor that has spread from somewhere else in the body. Cancer that started elsewhere in the body can sometimes spread to the brain. Cancer that started in the brain or spinal cord rarely spreads to other parts of the body.
- **Necrosis.** This means dead tissue.
- **Nervous system.** This is the brain and spinal cord, and the nerves branching from them and going all over the body.
- **Palliative care.** Palliative care is medical care for people with a serious illness. The goal is to relieve symptoms to improve a patient's quality of life. It can be helpful at any stage of illness and is different than hospice care.
- **Pathology.** This is the study of diseased cells and tissue, including tumors, to make a diagnosis and guide care.
- **Primary.** This refers to the original tumor.
- **Radiation therapy.** This is a treatment for cancer using different forms of high-energy radiation to kill cancer cells. The radiation may be given inside or outside of the body, or both.

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- **Stereotactic radiosurgery.** This is a type of radiation used to treat brain tumors using precise 3-D imaging and large doses of radiation. There's no surgery or cutting involved. It can be used to treat tumors that can't be treated with regular surgery.