

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

- **Endocrinologist.** This is a doctor who treats diseases related to the glands that make and release hormones. These glands include the thyroid, pineal, adrenal, and pituitary glands.
- **Medical oncologist.** This is a doctor who diagnoses cancer and treats it with chemotherapy and other medicines.
- **Neurologist.** This is a doctor who diagnoses and treats diseases of the nervous system.
- **Neuro-oncologist.** This is a doctor who treats tumors of the nervous system. A neuro-oncologist can be a medical oncologist, neurologist, or neurosurgeon.
- **Neurosurgeon.** This is a doctor 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.
- **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.
- **Radiation oncologist.** This is a doctor who uses radiation to treat cancer.
- **Radiation therapist.** These specialists help you get ready for and then operate the machine to give you radiation treatments.
- **Residents and interns.** These are doctors in training. They can prescribe medicine. But they often work with more experienced doctors called the attending physicians.
- **Physician assistant (PA).** These are healthcare providers who help doctors care for you. They can also prescribe medicine.
- **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.
- **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 cancer treatment that uses the immune system to fight a tumor.
- **Intracranial pressure (ICP).** This is the pressure inside the head or skull.
- **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, such as cancer that started in the lung, breast, or colon.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.