

Meet the Radiation Oncology Team

- **The radiation oncology team includes:**
- **Radiation Oncologists**
- **Radiation Oncology Nurses**
- **Radiation Therapists**
- **Medical Radiation Physicists**
- **Dosimetrists**
- **Other Healthcare Professionals**

Radiation Oncologists

Radiation oncologists are the doctors who will oversee your radiation therapy treatments. These physicians work with the other members of the radiation therapy team to develop your treatment plan and ensure that each treatment is given accurately. Your radiation oncologist will also monitor your progress and adjust the treatment as necessary to make sure the radiation is hitting its target while minimizing side effects. Before, during and after your radiation therapy treatments, your radiation oncologist works closely with other cancer doctors, such as medical oncologists and surgeons, to maximize the radiation's effectiveness. Radiation oncologists have completed at least four years of college, four years of medical school, one year of general medical training, and four years of residency or specialty training in radiation oncology. They have extensive training in cancer medicine and the safe use of radiation to treat disease. If they pass a special examination, they are certified by the American Board of Radiology. You should ask if your doctor is board certified.

Radiation Oncology Nurses

Radiation oncology nurses work together with radiation oncologists and radiation therapists to care for you and your family during your radiation treatments. They will explain the possible side effects that you may experience and describe how you can manage them. They will assess how you are doing throughout treatment and will help you cope with the changes you may experience. They will also provide support and counseling to you and your family. Radiation oncology nurses are licensed registered nurses or licensed practical nurses. Many registered nurses in radiation therapy have additional accreditation in the specialty of oncology nursing. Advanced practice nurses, including clinical nurse specialists and nurse practitioners, have completed a master's degree program.

Radiation Therapists

Radiation therapists work with radiation oncologists to administer the daily radiation treatment under the doctor's prescription and supervision. They maintain daily records and regularly check the treatment machines to make sure they are working properly. Radiation therapists go through a two- to four-year educational program following high school or college. They take a special examination and may be certified by the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists. In addition, many states require radiation therapists to be licensed.

Medical Radiation Physicists

Qualified medical physicists work directly with the radiation oncologist during treatment planning and delivery. They oversee the work of the dosimetrist and help ensure that complex treatments are properly tailored for each patient. Medical physicists are responsible for developing and directing quality control programs for equipment and procedures. Their responsibility also includes making sure the equipment works properly by taking precise measurements of the radiation beam and performing other safety tests on a regular basis.

Dosimetrists

Dosimetrists carefully calculate the dose of radiation to make sure the tumor gets enough radiation. Using computers, they work to develop a number of treatment plans that can best destroy the tumor while sparing normal tissue. Since treatment plans are often very complex, dosimetrists work with the radiation oncologist and the medical physicist to choose the treatment plan that is right for you. Many dosimetrists start as radiation therapists and then, with very intensive training, become dosimetrists. Others are graduates of one- to two-year dosimetry programs. They are certified by the Medical Dosimetrist Certification Board.

Other Healthcare Professionals

You may work with a number of other healthcare professionals while undergoing radiation therapy. These specialists ensure that all of your physical and psychological needs are met during your treatment.

Social Workers

Social workers are available to provide a variety of supportive services to you and your family. They can provide counseling to help you and your family cope with the diagnosis of cancer and with your treatment. They may also help arrange for home healthcare and other services.

Nutritionists

Nutritionists or dietitians work with patients to help them maintain their diet during their treatments. They will help you modify your eating plan if the side effects of treatment are affecting your appetite, will determine what you can eat, and can provide recipes, menu suggestions and information on ready-to-use nutritional supplements. They address dietary issues and current developments that may affect cancer treatment outcomes.

Physical Therapists

Physical therapists use therapeutic exercises to ensure that your body functions properly while you are undergoing treatment. These exercises are used to help manage side effects, alleviate pain and keep you healthy.

Dentists

Dentists may be involved in the care of patients who are receiving radiation for oral or head and neck cancers. They will help prevent the radiation from damaging the healthy areas of your mouth and oral cavity, and may recommend that you have preventive dental work prior to radiation. They will also help you manage oral complications of cancer therapy, such as dry mouth. A dental hygienist may also perform these services under the supervision of a dentist.