

Taking an active role in decisions regarding your treatment can have a positive effect on a patient's health and quality of life. You can start by looking for a specialist or by searching for a cancer center and finding a specialist there.

INSURANCE COVERAGE

For most people, insurance coverage is an important part of choosing a specialist or treatment center. Some insurance plans require these two things:

- A referral from your primary care doctor for a consultation with a specialist
- Choosing from the plan's in-network list of specialists and affiliated treatment centers

Check your insurance policy and speak to a representative to understand the coverage provided by your plan. Ask if your plan covers getting a second or third opinion.

If an insurance plan will not cover a particular specialist or treatment center, a letter from your doctor may help. Some treatment centers have social workers, case managers or patient advocates who can help patients and families navigate insurance.

Visit www.LLS.org/finances and read the free LLS booklet *Cancer and Your Finances* for more information.

FINDING A BLOOD CANCER SPECIALIST

Hematologists are doctors who specialize in treating diseases of the blood. A hematologist-oncologist is a doctor who specializes in treating blood cancers. A *board-certified* hematologist-oncologist has passed specialty medical board examinations. *Pediatric hematologist-oncologists* specialize in treating infants, children and adolescents who have blood cancers. A *hematopathologist* is a doctor who specializes in examining blood and bone marrow.

Some people with blood cancers are treated by other types of specialists. Because blood cancers are uncommon, doctors who are not blood cancer specialists can consult with a hematologist-oncologist.

GETTING A SECOND OPINION. Make sure you have the right diagnosis. Some people want to get a second or third opinion after receiving a diagnosis and before beginning or continuing treatment. However, for patients with acute illnesses (such as certain aggressive types of lymphoma or leukemia), it is important to discuss the risks of delaying treatment in order to see another doctor.

Visit www.LLS.org/WhatToAsk and click on "Second Opinion Consultation" or "Second Opinion Coverage," or call an Information Specialist at (800) 955-4572 for more information.

TYPES OF CANCER TREATMENT CENTERS

NCI-Designated Cancer Centers – The National Cancer Institute (NCI) is one of eight agencies that make up the National Institutes of Health (NIH). NCI recognizes centers around the country that meet rigorous standards for state-of-the-art research focused on developing new and better approaches to preventing, diagnosing and treating cancer.

University-Affiliated Hospitals or Centers – These centers are affiliated with a university or medical school and provide training for medical students. They may be NCI-designated and are likely to offer up-to-date cancer diagnoses, treatment and care and have a support staff.

Community Cancer Centers or Local Hospitals – There are many very good community cancer centers and hospitals throughout the country. Patients may choose to receive treatment at one of these centers because it is close to home, or because they already know and are comfortable with the healthcare professionals who practice there. If the local treatment center or hematologist-oncologist is affiliated with the Community Clinical Oncology Program, known as CCOP (an NCI-designated program for local and community oncologists to collaborate with NCI researchers), patients may be able to receive NCI-sponsored treatments, including access to clinical trials, at their local center.

If the local center is not affiliated with the NCI and/or a university or medical school, it is important to ask your specialist if they will be able to consult with a specialist before and during treatment.

CHOOSING A TREATMENT CENTER

Selecting a cancer treatment center may depend on several factors including your specific diagnosis, location and insurance coverage. You will want to choose an *accredited treatment center* (an organization that is evaluated against national standards) that offers the expertise to provide the treatment you will need. Most healthcare organizations and programs in the United States are evaluated for accreditation by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations. Receiving accreditation from The Joint Commission means that an organization complies with The Joint Commission's standards and strives to improve the care and services it provides. Visit <https://www.qualitycheck.org/> to review The Joint Commission's performance reports for participating institutions.

FINDING A SPECIALIST OR TREATMENT CENTER

Here are some ways to find a specialist or treatment center:

- Ask your primary care doctor for a recommendation.
- Contact your community cancer center.
- Reach out to doctor and/or insurance referral services.
- Call an LLS Information Specialist at 800.955.4572.
- Use an online doctor-finder resource, such as:
 - o The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) website at <https://www.certificationmatters.org/>
 - o “Find a Hematologist,” a service provided by the American Society of Hematology (ASH) at <https://www.hematology.org/education/patients/find-a-hematologist>
- Contact any of the following:
 - o The Association of Community Cancer Centers (ACCC) at <https://www.accc-cancer.org/>
 - o Find a CoC-Accredited Program, a service offered by the Commission on Cancer (CoC) through the American College of Surgeons website at <https://www.facs.org/quality-programs/cancer-programs/commission-on-cancer/>
 - o The National Cancer Institute (NCI) website, which lists all NCI-designated comprehensive cancer centers at <https://www.cancer.gov/research/infrastructure/cancer-centers>
 - o The National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) website, which offers information on transplant centers at <https://bethematch.org/tcdirectory/search/>

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU CHOOSE A SPECIALIST OR TREATMENT CENTER

When you are speaking with a doctor, if any information is unclear, ask them to slow down or explain things in another way. It is your right to be informed and the doctor’s responsibility to communicate clearly with you. You may want to have a family member or friend accompany you to your appointment(s) to help ask questions, take notes and lend support. This can make the visit less stressful and may help you remember what the specialist says more clearly.

Specific questions you may want to ask the doctor include:

- Are you board certified and licensed?
- How much experience do you have treating patients with my disease?
- Is your hospital, university, center or clinic accredited and experienced in treating blood cancers?
- How long should I expect to wait for appointments or return of my phone calls?

- Will there be nurses, social workers and case managers available to help me with support and quality-of-life concerns?
- When should I call you? When should I call my primary doctor instead?
- What is the best way to contact you?
- How do I contact you at night? On weekends? On holidays?

Specific questions to help you choose a treatment center include:

- Is treatment covered by my insurance plan?
- Does my primary care doctor or hematologist-oncologist have confidence in this treatment center?
- What type of accreditation does the treatment center have? Does the staff have experience in treating my specific type of blood cancer?
- Does the center offer the most current treatments?
- Does the center participate in clinical trials related to my diagnosis?
- Are support staff (nurses, social workers, case managers and patient advocates) available?
- Will I see the same support staff members at each visit?
- Is there a pharmacy on the premises or nearby?
- If required, is this center experienced in performing the type of stem cell transplant I will need?
- Can I speak to other cancer patients who are being treated or were treated at this center?

For a printable list of questions about choosing a specialist or treatment center, visit www.LLS.org/whattoask. You can also contact an Information Specialist at (800) 955-4572.

GET ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society’s **Information Specialists**, highly trained oncology social workers and nurses, can provide information and support and connect you to our **Clinical Trial Support Center** and **Registered Dietitians**.

- Call **800.955.4572** Mon.-Fri. 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. (ET)
- Visit **www.LLS.org/PatientSupport**

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