



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

THE ROLE OF PHARMACISTS DURING CANCER TREATMENT

A pharmacist is a professional who is qualified to fill prescription medications ordered by a doctor. They often provide information on how to take medications, potential drug interactions and tips on taking prescription medication on schedule.

There are many kinds of pharmacists who work with people living with cancer during their treatment. You may be familiar with community pharmacists, who work in local pharmacies to fill your prescriptions. There are also pharmacists who work in hospitals, clinics and specialty pharmacies to provide you with the best care possible during your treatment.

HOW YOUR PHARMACIST CAN HELP

Regardless of the type of medicine that a doctor prescribes, pharmacists help by:

Explaining how the medication works.

Your doctor or another member of your health care team may have reviewed the ins-and-outs of the medication when you received your prescription, but hearing the information more than once is helpful—especially during what can be a stressful time. If you are taking multiple medicines for different health problems, your pharmacist can also help you understand any potential medicine interactions that may be harmful or make your medicine less effective.

Reinforcing how the medication is to be taken. For example, some medications should be taken with meals; others should be taken on an empty stomach. If the medication is self-administered via an injection, the pharmacist can explain the proper injection technique.

Reviewing what side effects might occur. This information is provided in the “package insert” (PI) that accompanies the medication, but it can be valuable to hear it explained in everyday language. The pharmacist can also monitor any side effects you may experience, and offer guidance (in collaboration with your health care team) on possible ways to relieve the symptoms these side effects may cause.

Explaining what your insurance covers. An insurer may require that a generic (or biosimilar) version of the drug be dispensed, if one exists. Your pharmacist can help you determine if this is the case and explain any differences between the original drug and the covered drug, including any out-of-pocket cost implications.

Recommending financial resources. There are a number of financial aid organizations and patient assistance programs available to help patients with their out-of-pocket expenses. Your pharmacist can be a good source of information about these resources.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PHARMACIST

- What is this medication called?
- How does this medication work?
- How should I take this medication?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- What time of the day should I take this medication?
- Should I take it with or without food?
- Are there any activities, foods or other medications that I should avoid while taking this medication?
- What are the possible side effects and what side effects require my calling the doctor?

(over)

- How much will my medication cost?
- What type of co-payment assistance is available?

THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING YOUR MEDICATION ON SCHEDULE

Taking your medication on schedule is known as adherence. Adherence is key to getting the best result possible from your treatment. This is especially important if you are taking a pill for your cancer treatment. Unlike the cancer medicines given at your doctor's office, pills and other medicines put you in charge of your treatment. This means you are responsible for remembering to take your medicine as prescribed and on schedule.

How does adherence affect the results of your cancer treatment? If you are taking pills or administering self-injections, how you take or administer these medicines is important. These types of medicines release the active ingredient over a set period of time to keep a steady amount of medicine in the body. When you skip a dose, the level of medicine is lowered and this can reduce the medicine's success at treating the cancer. On the other hand, if you take doses too close together you may get too much of the medicine in your body. This extra medicine can lead to more side effects, which could be dangerous. For these reasons, it's very important to follow the instructions for taking your medicine. It is also important to take medicines prescribed for side effects as directed. This will ensure that the medicines are working their best to help with the symptoms they were prescribed for. If you are ever unsure of how you are supposed to take a medicine, don't hesitate to contact your pharmacist or someone on your medical team.



REMINDER SYSTEMS FOR TAKING MEDICATIONS

- Pillboxes
- Alarms on phone, computer, watch or pillbox
- Reminder calls from family, friends or pharmacy
- In-home health services
- Printed schedules
- Treatment diaries
- Pairing your medication with a time of day or a daily routine

CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercares.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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