Questions to ask your doctor about Prostate Cancer and selecting a treatment facility
The Basics

Establishing an open dialogue with a doctor provides you with the opportunity to learn specific information regarding the staging and diagnosis of your cancer, your treatment options and, most importantly, your physician’s credentials and experience. Before meeting with a doctor, it’s important to know the basics.

1. **Bring someone with you:** Bringing a friend or loved one to the consultation can help to calm you, and ensure you ask all of the necessary questions.

2. **Take notes:** Logging the doctor’s responses to questions will help you keep track of the information the doctor provides, and will serve as a useful reference after the consultation ends.

3. **Prepare written questions and thoughts BEFORE the consultation:** Time is usually limited during a consultation; therefore, writing a list of questions before the consultation allows you to fully utilize the time you have with the doctor.

You may want to consider incorporating some of the following general questions into your own list.

**Questions to ask a Urologist and a Medical Oncologist**

- Is my cancer confined to the prostate? How do you know?

- Identifying your prostate cancer’s *stage* (i.e. Stage I, II, III or IV) is critical to selecting the appropriate treatment. What laboratory and diagnostic testing will you use to definitively stage my prostate cancer and how can you assure me of the accuracy of your diagnosis and staging? *You need to be certain your doctor has access to the best tools available to properly stage your cancer*

- How aggressive is my cancer? Is it fast growing or slow? Is it hormone positive or negative?
• What additional tests would you recommend and what additional information would the tests provide?

• What are all of the possible treatment options that I should know about? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each and why do you recommend the option you are suggesting?

• What treatment options do you normally recommend for people with my type and stage of prostate cancer? What results do you expect?

• Why do you recommend this treatment over others?

• How long will your suggested treatment protocol last?

• How often will I have this treatment?

• How will this treatment affect my sex life?

• How will this treatment affect my physical and emotional well being? Are there any other side effects I need to consider?

• Will I have to change my normal activities? If so, for how long?
• Would you please tell me about your training, qualifications and experience in treating men with my type and stage of prostate cancer?

• What is your view of working cooperatively with other professionals who will care for me in other areas of physical or emotional need that may arise during the course of my treatment (e.g. psychologists, nutritionists, physical therapists)?

Experience Matters

Research studies conducted by National Cancer Institute Comprehensive Cancer Center hospitals illustrate the correlation between the numbers of specific surgical procedures a surgeon performs and the surgeon’s success rate with that same procedure. Diagnosing, staging and treating specific forms of cancer equips physicians with a certain focus and a level of specialization that can have a very real, positive impact on your treatment process. But you need to ask the right questions to properly assess the experience of a physician and the qualifications of a hospital.

Surgery Related Questions

Surgery remains a common form of therapy used to treat prostate cancer. If you elect to pursue surgical treatment, you can use some of these questions during your consultation to help you learn more about surgical treatment options.

• How certain are you that my cancer is confined to my prostate?

• From a Surgeon’s perspective, can you please give me your insight into the benefits and/or shortcomings of prostate surgery? How do you weigh these benefits and/or shortcomings against other prostate cancer treatments? Based upon your knowledge of my situation, please provide me with your recommendation.
• What are the risks of this surgery?

• What are the potential complications associated with this surgery? How common are these complications and what can be done if they occur?

• What is the average rate of impotence and incontinence when you perform this surgery? (Ask for the doctor’s personal results, not standard, published results.)

• What measures do you take to minimize the risk of impotence and incontinence?

• How long is the recovery period after surgery and how soon after surgery may I start additional therapies (if necessary)?

• Please discuss your experience with this procedure.

• How many of these specific surgical procedures have you performed in the past year?

• What is the Surgeon’s success rate for this surgery? Define the word “success.”

• What is the total number of similar surgeries you have performed during your career?

• Can I speak to other patients you’ve operated on?
• Why do you prefer this method?

• Are there any non-surgical ways to treat this condition? Please discuss the non-surgical options available at this hospital.

• Who will perform the operation? Will a surgical resident (surgeon-in-training) perform the operation?

### Radiation Oncology Related Questions

Most prostate cancer patients undergo some type of radiation therapy - either alone or in conjunction with other treatments. Before choosing to work with a Radiation Oncologist, be certain to ask these questions.

• From a Radiation Oncologist's perspective, can you please give me your insight into the benefits and/or shortcomings of each type of radiation therapy? Based upon your knowledge of my situation, please provide me with your recommendation.

• What are the risks of this procedure?

• What are the potential complications associated with this procedure? How common are these complications and what can be done if they occur?

• What measures do you take to minimize the risks?
• How long is the recovery period after surgery and how soon after surgery may I start additional therapies (if necessary)?

• Please discuss your experience with this procedure.

• How many of these specific surgical procedures have you performed in the past year?

• What is the Radiation Oncologist’s success rate for this surgery?

• What is the total number of similar procedures you have performed during your career?

• Can I speak to other patients you’ve treated?

• Why do you prefer this method of delivering radiation compared to other delivery methods?
Evaluating the Information

Information gathered from the doctor’s responses to these questions increases your knowledge base and provides a deeper understanding of the disease, the treatment options and the doctor’s approach to delivering care. But more than the doctor’s treatment approach, a face-to-face consultation allows you the opportunity to assess the doctor’s personality.

You should ask these questions after meeting a doctor:

• Am I comfortable talking with this physician?
• Does this physician have the time to talk with me?
• Does this physician genuinely listen to my concerns and offer meaningful feedback?
• Do I believe this doctor (or team of doctors) has the skill and know-how to help me fight this cancer with every available option?

Combining all of the information gathered from this process equips you with a more complete overview of the doctor’s approach to treating prostate cancer.
Selecting Your Treatment Hospital

Selecting the right treatment hospital is an extremely important decision. Community Hospitals, University Hospitals and Private Clinics scatter the healthcare landscape, providing you with a variety of choices. Weighing these choices by gauging a hospital’s specific services, relative to your needs, is one effective way for you to choose a treatment hospital.

You may want to use the following criteria to assess a treatment facility:

- **Services:** All hospitals are NOT created equal! As you research hospitals and review the multitude of oncology programs available, one constant thought should always be, "How will this program integrate its services to help me fight _my_ cancer on all fronts?"

- **Staff:** A hospital is nothing more than bricks and mortar without the doctors, nurses, nutritionists, naturopaths, mind-body specialists and pastoral support staff members who make up the care team. You may differentiate one hospital from another by noting the approach the staff takes to patient care – do staff members collaborate with you, and advocate your participation in the decision-making process?

- **Technology:** Recent technological advances in diagnostic imaging, radiation and chemotherapies are changing the face of cancer treatment today; patients deservedly reap the benefits from the precision mapping and treatment delivery options now available. A hospital with state-of-the-art technology equips doctors with powerful and more exacting means of delivering innovative and expert care, right where the patient needs it most. As you examine various treatment options with a hospital, ask the question, "Is the diagnostic and other treatment equipment available at this hospital the most advanced of its kind?"
The Playing Field At-A-Glance

Community Hospitals
The Association of Community Cancer Centers estimates over 80 percent of U.S. cancer patients visit a Community Hospital for treatment. These facilities focus upon delivering patient care. Sometimes, Community Hospitals lack the financial resources to offer the advanced diagnostic testing and treatment protocols available in larger hospital settings. This is an issue you should investigate carefully.

University Hospitals
The broad "University Hospital" designation refers to Academic and Teaching Hospitals—titles reflecting a hospital’s affiliation with a major university and medical school. Featuring broad research/laboratory initiatives as well as a dedicated oncology staff, University Hospitals generally provide access to a variety of clinical research trials, laboratory research programs and advanced diagnostic testing and treatment protocols.

Private Clinics
Private Clinics provide patient care in a freestanding, non-hospital setting. Like the professional buildings that house both dentists and orthodontists, Private Clinics usually feature a group of Oncologists with the same medical expertise practicing one or possibly two of the three traditional oncology treatment modalities—surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Compared to larger treatment hospitals, these smaller facilities typically offer limited on-site diagnostic testing and treatment services. If you elect to receive care in a private clinic setting, you may be required to visit other larger facilities or parent hospitals for testing and/or follow-up therapy.

Helpful Questions to Ask When Evaluating a Hospital

• Has this facility been reviewed by any accrediting boards or patient satisfaction surveys? If yes, would you please discuss the results of those reviews/surveys?

• How many patients with prostate cancer does this facility see per year?
• Does this hospital practice an integrated approach to cancer care? If so, please explain.

• How many treatments or surgical procedures specific to my cancer are conducted annually?

• What special hospital services or support services will I require during my stay? How do these services work together?

• Does this hospital participate in clinical trials specific to prostate cancer?

• Does this hospital provide a pain-management department to help ease pain or other side effects that might arise during treatment?

• How old or new is the diagnostic and x-ray equipment in this facility?

• Does this hospital have laboratory, imaging and other testing facilities on-site?

• What facilities focusing upon cancer research are affiliated with this hospital? Are new research findings integrated into the hospital’s listing of treatment protocol?

• Please estimate the percentage of time I will spend working with a doctor-in-training (called a resident) versus the time I will spend working with a more experienced, senior physician.
Our Mission

At Cancer Treatment Centers of America, we empower patients to become Cancer Fighters, rather than cancer victims. We actively involve you and your family in a treatment plan that integrates medical, nutritional, psychological, and spiritual therapies. And we do it all in a unique, caring environment.

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