

Getting Quality Care as a Cancer Patient: What you can expect, what you can do

The Canada Health Act aims to “protect, promote and restore the physical and mental well-being of residents of Canada and to facilitate reasonable access to health services without financial or other barriers.” Likewise, your healthcare providers aim to uphold these principles by offering the best quality care possible, based on current scientific knowledge and available resources.

As a cancer patient, or as the guardian or advocate of a cancer patient, you should expect:

- treatment in a qualified hospital or cancer centre by well-trained professionals
- a timely and correct diagnosis by a cancer specialist
- the best standard of care available for all stages of illness, including tests, diagnosis, surgery, drug treatment, follow-up, support, and palliative care
- privacy, confidentiality, protection of personal information, and access to your medical records or those of your loved one
- that healthcare providers will explain to you the best treatments available, including new or experimental treatments
- sensitive care in which all possible steps are taken to reduce harm
- respect for cultural, racial, gender, and religious differences, as well as differences in age, sexual orientation, financial situation, and physical, mental and intellectual abilities
- that your healthcare team will provide or direct you to other services you may need, including:
 - counselling or support (“psychosocial services”) from psychologists, social workers, cancer nurses, spiritual leaders, or community support groups
 - information about financial support for costs that are not covered, e.g. drug coverage, transportation
 - translation or interpretation
 - information about accessing care or treatment that is not locally available
 - any services required by family or other caregivers as they support you or your child/loved one through cancer

As a cancer patient, or as the guardian or advocate of a cancer patient, you are entitled to ask questions, be informed, and take part in decisions about your or your loved one’s care, including:

- expressing any concerns about treatment
- asking for information in clear, understandable language
- asking for a second opinion without fear that treatment will be affected
- exploring treatment options in other provinces or countries
- deciding whether students or researchers are present
- being informed and making decisions about alternative or complementary treatments
- refusing any course of treatment

- seeking legal advice about a complaint if necessary

You can enhance the quality of care by providing your healthcare team with as much information as possible in the following areas:

- past and present health concerns, hospital stays, medications, etc., including information about home, social life, school, or work that might influence care
- any difficulties you may have in complying with treatment schedules and appointments
- any difficulties you may have in affording treatment or related expenses
- any legal issues or documents that relate to care or decision-making e.g. power of attorney or court orders
- the need for translation or interpretation services
- emotional distress, isolation, or depression, and the need for social or peer support

~ Prepared for the Cancer Journey Action Group, May 2008