



What is a Second Opinion?

Making decisions about healthcare is one of the most important in a person's life. Many people are told that they have cancer or another life threatening illness and feel that they must make a decision to begin treatment immediately. This may be true in some cases but taking the time to learn about your disease and obtaining a second opinion is actually very reasonable. Proactive decision making will give you a greater degree of control over your treatment so that you can make a more informed decision.

Most doctors will welcome another physician's input. Your doctor may even be able to recommend a specialist. A good doctor understands your right to be well informed and should support a second opinion. Not every doctor will have the same opinion with regard to diseases and possible treatments. Factors which may have an effect on a doctor's opinion are the technology available to that doctor, school of thought, where they were trained, individual methods of treatment and experience in dealing with that particular diagnosis.

It never hurts to get a second opinion. Keep in mind that doctors are human and they too can make mistakes or be faced with unusual or challenging cases. When the first doctor's opinion is the same or similar to the second doctor's, your confidence will be increased. There is nothing lost by visiting one more doctor just to make sure that the first doctor's opinion is correct.

What do I need to gather for a second opinion appointment?

Most physicians will require the patient to make an appointment and have an examination for a second opinion; they will not just give an opinion by reviewing records. Be sure to arrive with contact information about the first physician, insurance card, list of prescribed medications and allergies. Most physicians will also require you to bring your medical records which would include your pathology report and any other diagnostic tests such as lab work and x-rays that were done at the time of your cancer diagnosis. If able, it would also be good to get a copy of the initial consultation and treatment recommendations.

Will my insurance cover a second opinion?

Call your insurance provider before scheduling a second opinion appointment to prevent any confusion or denial of the bill. You need to know exactly what will be covered, such as an out of network provider, any lab work or testing that may be required. Diagnostic tests can be very costly and many insurance providers will not pay for them if they were completed for the initial diagnosis. If you have coverage through Medicare, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) or for specific rules by state for a second opinion you can visit

<http://www.medicare.gov/coverage/home.asp>

Additional resources available at: www.patientadvocate.org