Common Terms

Many different cancer related terms will be used by doctors and nurses throughout your treatment.

While some may be familiar, knowing the precise meaning can give you, your family and loved ones, a better understanding of your diagnosis.

- **Acute** Refers to symptoms that start and worsen quickly but do not last over a long period of time.
- **Benign** Refers to a tumour that is not cancer. The tumour does not usually invade nearby tissue or spread to other parts of the body.
- **Bone marrow** The soft, spongy tissue found in the centre of large bones where blood cells are formed.
- **Carcinoma Cancer** that starts in skin or tissues that line the inside or cover the outside of internal organs.
- **Cells** The basic units that make up the human body.
- **Chemotherapy** Drugs that kill cancer cells.
- **Chronic** Refers to a disease or condition that persists, often slowly, over a long period of time.
- **Invasive** Cancer that has spread outside the layer of tissue in which it started and has the potential to grow into other parts of the body.
- **Leukaemia** A cancer of the blood. Leukaemia begins when normal white blood cells change and grow uncontrollably.
- **Localised cancer** Cancer that is confined to the area where it started and has not spread to other parts of the body.
- **Lymph nodes** Tiny, bean-shaped organs that help fight infection. Part of the lymphatic system.
- **Lymphatic system** A network of small vessels, ducts, and organs that carry fluid to and from the bloodstream and body tissues. Through the lymphatic system, cancer can spread to other parts of the body.
- **Lymphoma** A cancer of the lymphatic system. Lymphoma begins when cells in the lymph system change and grow uncontrollably. Sometimes a tumour is formed.
- **Malignant** Refers to a tumour that is cancerous. It may invade nearby healthy tissue or spread to other parts of the body.
- **Mass** A lump in the body, can be cancer or benign.
- **Metastasis** The spread of cancer from the place where the cancer began to another part of the body. Cancer cells can break away from the primary tumour and travel through the blood or the lymphatic system to the lymph nodes, brain, lungs, bones, liver, or other organs.
- **Primary cancer** Describes the original cancer.
- **Prognosis** Chance of recovery; a prediction of the outcome of a disease.
- **Sarcoma** A cancer that develops in the tissues that support and connect the body, such as fat and muscle.
- **Secondary cancer** Describes either a new primary cancer (a different type of cancer) that develops after treatment from the first type of cancer, or cancer that has spread to other parts of the body from the place where it started.
- **Stage** A way of describing cancer, such as where it is located, whether or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting the functions of other organs in the body.
- **Tumour** A mass formed when normal cells begin to change and grow uncontrollably. A tumour can be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous, meaning it can spread to other parts of the body). Also called a nodule or mass.

Treatment terms

- **Biopsy** The removal of a small amount of tissue for examination under a microscope. Other tests can suggest that cancer is present, but only a biopsy can make a definite diagnosis.
- **Bone scan** A scan which uses a small amount of radioactive material which produces a map of your bones. This is used to show any changes to their structure or make-up.
- **CT scan** An x-ray machine using a computer to produce pictures of the head or body. It shows the soft tissues and bones in more detail than an ordinary x-ray.
- **Echocardiogram (ECHO)** An ultrasound of your heart.
- **Electrocardiogram (ECG)** A recording of your heart's electrical activity.
- **GFR** is a test performed that measures the function of your kidneys.
- **MRI** A scanner which produces cross sectional soft tissue images of any area of your body.
- **Multi gated assessment (MUGA)** A test of the heart designed to evaluate the function of the right and left ventricles.
- **Ultrasound** Uses high frequency sound waves and a computer to produce pictures of most parts of the body.

Your Care Team

Here are some of the people you may meet and the role they have in your care.

- **Medical oncologists** are doctors who specialise in diagnosing and treating cancer with the use of chemotherapy drugs, immunotherapy and hormone therapies. A medical oncologist will develop and continually review the chemotherapy treatment plan and in most cases, lead and manage the overall care.
- **Haematologists** specialise in treating blood disorders and cancers affecting the blood e.g. leukaemia, or blood forming organs such as the bone marrow.
- **Radiation oncologists** are the specialist doctors who prescribes radiation therapy treatments for all types of cancer, and oversees the management of care for patients.
- **Radiation therapists** are responsible for the planning and delivery of your daily radiation treatments
- **Oncology nurses** will support you throughout many areas of your treatment and overall wellbeing, including administering your chemotherapy, monitoring your symptoms and managing any side effects. Your nursing team can answer any questions you may have and provide additional sources of information regarding your treatment and diagnosis.
- **Pharmacists** are committed to supporting your care. Pharmacists work with you and alongside your doctor and nursing team to make sure the treatment you receive is optimal and safe. Pharmacists answer questions, provide advice and information about your medications.
- **Medical physicists** play an important role in quality assurance to ensure our radiation treatment machine are maintained according to regulatory standards and that our working environment abides by radiation safety policies.

You may need additional support from other allied health professionals such as dietitians or physiotherapists while you are having treatment. See our Guide to Allied Health resource to understand what services are available and how they can help you.