The Multidisciplinary Cancer Conference

What Is a Multidisciplinary Cancer Conference?
As cancer care becomes more complex, its treatment often requires a complex multidisciplinary approach. Multidisciplinary cancer conferences, often historically called tumor boards, are meetings in which physicians from various specialties and other health care professionals discuss cases of patients with cancer and recommend a treatment plan. This renaming stems from the desire to shift from a tumor-centered to a patient-centered perspective.

Multidisciplinary cancer conferences are often disease or organ specific. Although some hospital systems may discuss all new patient cases at the conference, the discussion is typically about patients with more complex cases, where there is not strong evidence to guide treatment decision-making.

Who Participates in a Multidisciplinary Cancer Conference?
The conference typically hosts a range of expert specialists from radiology, pathology, surgery, and oncology (medical, radiation, surgical). Depending on the type of cancer the patient has, additional subspecialists may be present, such as a pulmonologist for lung cancer, a gastroenterologist for gastrointestinal cancers, or a urologist for prostate, testicular, or kidney cancers. Palliative care specialists may also be present to discuss how to reduce the symptom burden a patient may experience during treatment. Additional health care professionals, including nurses/nurse navigators, research nurses/coordinators, and social workers, may be present to help coordinate and implement the proposed treatment plan.

What Happens During the Conference?
Each case is presented by a physician on the patient’s oncology team who has typically already seen the patient in clinic. First, there is a review of the patient’s cancer history and overall medical history, other health issues, and activity level. A detailed review of the cancer history includes a review of scans, biopsy results with pathology review, and treatments that the patient has already received, along with the response to those treatments.

After this review, the group engages in a balanced, multidisciplinary discussion to arrive at a recommended individualized care plan. If applicable, clinical trial options that might be available to the patient will also be discussed.

How Does the Discussion Translate Into a Plan?
The group’s recommended management plan is then discussed in detail with the patient and their caregiver(s) in clinic, with a final strategy ideally based on decision-making compatible with the patient’s preferences, goals of care, and health concerns.

What Are the Benefits of This Conference?

- In-depth discussion of complex cases
- Individualized treatment plans for the patient
- Opportunity for multiple second opinions all in 1 setting
- Other health care professionals, such as social workers and nurse navigators, can discuss barriers and how to overcome them
- Consideration of clinical trial options that might be available
- Review of resources and support needed for physical, psychological, dietary, and other patient needs
- Coordination of care between subspecialties, shortening the time to start of treatment
- Optimization of patient outcomes

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Cancer.Net
www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care
American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/planning-managing.html

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