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## The Role of Medical Oncology in Your Cancer Treatment

### What is the role of a medical oncologist?

A medical oncologist is trained to manage and treat all aspects of a patient with cancer. At our Center, this individual is specifically trained to manage men with prostate cancer. Typically, the medical oncologist manages men with prostate cancer when it has become advanced and has spread to tissues outside the prostate. Treatment may consist of chemotherapy, hormone therapy, investigational agents, or various combinations of these treatments. At our Center, the medical oncologist is an integral part of the entire team and provides expertise in other areas, such as providing guidance for decisions about treatment for early stage prostate cancer and management of a rising PSA which occurs after initial therapy or while receiving hormone therapy.

### What is the role of chemotherapy in prostate cancer and does it play a role for me?

Chemotherapy is typically given to men with prostate cancer that has worsened in spite of hormone therapy and has spread to other organs, typically bones and lymph nodes. In these patients, chemotherapy has been proven to prolong survival. There are different types of chemotherapy that can be used. Further, chemotherapy is now being tested in patients with earlier stage prostate cancer as a way to improve the outcome when surgery or radiation therapy alone may not be adequate. Although some side-effects from chemotherapy may be significant, our medical oncologists have a great deal of experience using these drugs and can greatly minimize these side-effects.

### What are the side-effects to chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy consists of a wide range of drugs which may have different types and degrees of side-effects. Typical side-effects involve various degrees of nausea, hair loss, fatigue/anemia, increased risk of infection or bleeding, mouth sores, and loss of appetite. New medications are now available which significantly reduce many of these problems, including anti-nausea medication, drugs that improve fatigue/anemia, and drugs that lessen the risk of infection. Our staff is trained to do everything possible to prevent and manage these side-effects.

### Do you have any clinical trial options for treatment of my prostate cancer?

Yes, prostate cancer patients at our Center have an array of clinical trials available to them. Clinical trials are “investigational” treatments that involve new drugs or utilize standard drugs in novel ways. These trials offer “cutting-edge” treatments to patients when standard treatments are ineffective or have too many side-effects. These treatments undergo close scrutiny by the Investigational Review Board (IRB) at NorthShore to ensure the safety of the treatment. Currently, our Center offers clinical trials for most stages of prostate cancer.

### What is hormone therapy?

Hormone therapy is a highly effective treatment for prostate cancer. The treatment causes reduction in blood testosterone to very low levels. Since most prostate cancer cells require the presence of testosterone for growth, the treatment results in significant benefit to the patient. Treatment typically consists of an injection of medication that lowers the testosterone level and is given every 3-4 months. An oral medication that further blocks the effect of testosterone is often given along with the injection. Hormone therapy may have various side-effects.

### What are the side-effects of hormone therapy and can anything be done to improve and prevent them?

Prostate cancer is frequently managed with hormone therapy. This treatment can be very effective but does have side-effects. The most common side-effects include hot flashes, muscle weakness, diminished sexual urge/erectile dysfunction, loss of bone density, weight gain, breast tenderness, and mild anemia. There is some controversy whether hormone therapy can affect memory, increase risk of heart attacks, and affect control of blood glucose levels. We take these side-effects very seriously and are working hard to prevent and manage them. We aggressively monitor bone density levels and intervene to prevent and treat bone loss. We have developed exercise programs to maintain muscle strength and prevent weight gain. We have a sexual rehabilitation program to maximize sexual function. Finally, we often administer hormone therapy on an intermittent basis to reduce these side-effects.

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### Whom do I contact if I am having trouble managing side effects?

Our Center is staffed with personnel who can help manage these side-effects. Please contact Dr. Shevrin at (847) 570-2515, and you will be directed to the appropriate individual.

### How can I keep my bones strong during treatment of my cancer with hormone therapy?

Bone health is extremely important for men with prostate cancer receiving hormone therapy. We know that this therapy can lead to loss of bone density and increase the risk of fractures. We monitor bone density regularly and involve all patients in prevention programs with diet and exercise. It is very important to have proper levels of vitamin D and calcium in the body. When bone loss (osteopenia or osteoporosis) is found, intervention with medications can help stabilize and even improve bone loss. These drugs may include oral medications Fosamax or Actonel, or an intravenous drug called Zometa.

### When should hormone therapy and radiation therapy be combined in treatment of prostate cancer?

Treatment with both hormone therapy and radiation therapy may be the right treatment for you. When a man's prostate cancer is relatively large and likely extends outside the prostate capsule, radiation is the primary treatment of choice. Studies have shown that adding hormone therapy greatly improves clinical outcome and prolongs survival. Also, hormone therapy is typically included if the prostate gland is enlarged from BPH (benign prostatic hyperplasia, or enlargement) in order to reduce the size of the prostate prior to treatment with radiation. This can help reduce side-effects from the radiation. When hormone therapy is included with radiation, it is typically given for 6 months to 3 years.

### Are there new developments in the treatment of advanced prostate cancer?

There are many new and exciting developments in the management of prostate cancer, and we at the NorthShore Prostate Cancer Center are involved in many of them. These include improvements in diagnosis, assessment of prognosis, determination of risk for recurrence after treatment with surgery or radiation, and, of course, new "cutting-edge" treatments. We are involved in new approaches to diet as a way to affect prostate cancer growth. We are also involved in determining genetic risk to your family members. All of us at the Center are committed to translational research, where findings in the lab are quickly brought to the bedside, and strive to make these new and exciting developments available to our patients.

**For more information about medical oncology and its role in your care, speak with your oncologist for further details.**

If you would like to contact the Comprehensive Prostate Cancer Center please call: 847-657-5730