

How and Why to Get A Second Opinion



Patients who receive a brain tumor diagnosis often want to get a second opinion. Getting a second opinion means asking another physician to review your case. A second opinion can confirm an initial diagnosis and/or can be used to compare suggested courses of treatment.

If possible, it is best to get a second opinion before treatment has begun. Therefore, a second opinion should be obtained as soon as possible to avoid delaying treatment. The following list of questions can help you decide how and why to get a second opinion.

What does a second opinion involve?

Second opinions involve a review of pathology reports, laboratory tests, medical records and notes from the doctor who diagnosed your illness. Sometimes, second opinions can include a physical examination by the doctor providing the second opinion. You may also be asked for insurance information. Ask the second-opinion physician to specify exactly what information must be provided to him or her in order to properly evaluate your case.

Some medical centers offer the services of a tumor board. A tumor board is a regular meeting of specialists from the treatment team who come together to discuss patients and their brain tumors. Tumor boards include specialists from multiple disciplines, such as neurosurgeons, neurologists, and radiation oncologists. The tumor board meets and reviews the patient's MRI films and clinical and pathological information, then discusses treatment options and makes a group recommendation regarding treatment.

When is a second opinion a good idea?

A second opinion is a good idea if:

- Your physician is not a neuro-oncologist or does not have experience with brain tumors.
- You want to confirm your primary physician's recommendation or your doctor does not have a team of specialists to consult with.
- You are interested in clinical trials.
- You have difficulty communicating with your physician.
- You have read about treatments that your physician is not familiar with.
- You are unsure of the course of treatment your doctor is recommending.
- You live in a rural area where local physicians may not have extensive experience treating brain tumors.
- You have a rare brain tumor type.

What will my doctor think if I want a second opinion?

Some patients may find it difficult to seek a second opinion, perhaps for fear of offending their physician. However, most physicians are not apt to feel offended if you seek a second opinion. Patients should understand that they have a right to a second opinion, and most health care professionals acknowledge that right.

What will I need in order to get a second opinion?

You will need copies of all scans, diagnostic tests, lab and pathology reports, and all records regarding your condition. As a rule, you should keep personal copies of these materials. Whenever scans are being made, request copies from the technician. This can reduce the waiting time and cost that may occur if you request them at a later date.

Fact Sheet: How and Why to Get A Second Opinion

How much does a second opinion cost?

The cost of a second opinion varies greatly. Most health insurance plans pay for second opinions. Exactly what your insurance company will cover depends on your particular plan. Check with your carrier before you receive the second opinion to determine whether you will have any out-of-pocket expenses. It is helpful to investigate the following questions beforehand:

- Does the doctor charge for a second opinion? If so, how much?
- Does your insurance company cover all or part of the cost?
- What will your out-of-pocket expenses be?
- Will your HMO or PPO (if applicable) pay for a second opinion from a doctor who is outside of their network?
- May you seek a second opinion on your own? If not, whose authorization do you need?
- If you need your primary care doctor's consent to get a second opinion and she or he refuses, how can you appeal?

If you have to travel to another city for a second opinion, be aware that you may be responsible for those travel costs.

How can I help someone else seek a second opinion?

To act on another's behalf, you must have the patient's permission. Some medical professionals may require that you obtain the patient's permission in writing before they will cooperate with you. This is true for anyone, even relatives and friends.

How can I find a brain tumor specialist?

Patients can ask their family physician for a referral to a specialist who can give a second opinion. Many major medical centers can provide a second opinion. Call them or visit their web sites to request information on how to proceed. Some treatment centers can even provide a second opinion via email. In addition, you might consider some of the following strategies:

- **Contact National Brain Tumor Society's Patient Services** at **800 934 2873**, to learn more about how to get a second opinion. National Brain Tumor Society's Treatment Center Database provides information about treatment facilities throughout the United States and is available at <http://www.braintumor.org>.
- **Request a consultation with a team of specialists** through the Neuro-Oncology Branch, a trans-institution program of the National Cancer Institute/National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Stroke in Bethesda, Maryland. Patients or physicians may contact the Neuro-Oncology Branch at their toll-free New Patient Line, **866 251 9686**.
- **Contact the Cancer Information Service**, at **800 4 CANCER** or **800 422 6237** for a referral to a treatment center near you.

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