



## Types of doctors who help care for children with cancer

**Pediatric oncologist:** A doctor who specializes in cancers of children. (Pediatric means dealing with the health of children. Oncology means cancer.) They generally are board-certified, which means they've passed written national exams. They plan and direct cancer treatment. In a teaching hospital they serve as the doctor in charge. There might be more than one on the team, in which case they might rotate or switch places from one day to the next. They often work closely with physician assistants (PAs) and nurse practitioners (discussed in the next section).

**Pediatric hematologist:** A doctor who specializes in diseases of the blood and blood-forming tissues of children (Hematology means blood disease.)

**Pediatric hematology or oncology fellow:** A pediatrician training to become a hematologist or oncologist

**Pediatric resident:** A doctor training to become a pediatrician. They are in teaching hospitals, usually spending a certain length of time on the hematology or oncology service

**Medical students:** Although not yet doctors, third and fourth year medical students in teaching hospitals are assigned monthly rotations on the hematology or oncology services and help care for patients

**Radiologist:** A doctor with special training in diagnosing diseases by reading x-rays and other types of imaging studies, like CT scans and MRIs

**Pediatric surgeon:** A doctor who treats medical problems in children with surgery. Some surgeons specialize in different parts of the body. For example, thoracic surgeons operate on the chest.

**Neurosurgeon:** A doctor who specializes in operations on the brain, spine, or other parts of the nervous system

**Neurologist:** A doctor who treats problems of the nervous system

**Orthopedic surgeon:** A surgeon who specializes in diseases and injuries of the bones

**Pathologist:** A doctor who specializes in diagnosing and classifying diseases by lab tests, such as looking at tissue and cells under a microscope. The pathologist decides if a tumor is cancer, and, if it is, the exact cell type.

**Psychiatrist:** A medical doctor who specializes in mental health and behavioral disorders. Psychiatrists prescribe medicines and can also provide counseling.

**Endocrinologist:** A doctor who specializes in diseases related to the glands of the endocrine system, such as the thyroid, pancreas, and adrenal glands

**Gynecologist:** A doctor who specializes in women's health and the female reproductive system

**Anesthesiologist:** A doctor who specializes in giving medicines or other agents that prevent or relieve pain, especially during surgery

Other doctors in the medical center and its clinics may play a part in caring for children and teens with cancer, depending on the diagnosis, treatment plan, or symptoms that develop during the course of treatment. All work closely with the basic cancer care team to coordinate care.

## **Other professionals who may help care for a child or teen with cancer**

There are many professionals and specialists other than doctors who may work with your child or family. Here are just a few more you may meet.

**Physician assistants (PAs):** These are certified and licensed medical professionals with master's or doctoral level degrees. Physician assistants practice medicine on teams with doctors and other health care professionals, providing a wide range of services. They may specialize in certain diseases or fields of medicine depending on their training and experience.

**Pediatric Nurse Practitioner or Family Nurse Practitioner (PNP or FNP; also called Advanced Practice Registered Nurses or APRNs):** Registered nurses with a master's or doctoral degree, special training, and certification in caring for children; they work closely with the doctor in planning care. The nurse practitioner may perform medical tests such as spinal taps and often works closely with the family to teach about the child's cancer. Nurse practitioners are authorized by their states to perform expanded functions which may include writing prescriptions, diagnostic testing, and prescribing treatment.

**Nurses:** Like doctors, nurses have different roles and titles based on their education and training. Nurses help care for and treat children and teens with cancer. They play an important part in teaching the patient and family about cancer and its physical and

when referrals are made to home health agencies.

**Teams of nurses may include:**

**Registered nurses (RN):** Nurses with associate or bachelor degrees who are licensed by their states to practice nursing. They give medicines (often including chemo), start

at least a bachelor's degree and has passed a national exam.

**Radiation therapists:** Professionals with special training to work the equipment that delivers radiation treatment.

**Pharmacologists:** Professionals trained in understanding the properties, dosing, and uses of drugs. They may consult with the cancer team about the uses, reactions, and interactions of drugs used to treat cancer and manage symptoms.

**Pediatric psychologists:** Psychologists generally have doctoral degrees and are licensed to practice after passing a written exam. Some psychologists specialize in oncology. They help patients understand and talk about their cancer. They are skilled in helping young people use a variety of techniques to get through surgery, radiation treatment, chemo, nausea, pain, IVs, shots (injections), procedures, scans, and other tests. The psychologist also might work with patients, parents, and other team members to look at educational needs and help with school issues. They evaluate a child's mental and emotional state and provide counseling to children and teens to help them cope with their illness. They often refer patients to mental health providers and services in the family's home community. There usually is a fee associated with their professional services, but insurance could cover at least part of it.

**Chaplains or pastoral counselors:** These counselors help care for the spiritual needs of the patient and family and are available in most medical centers. They often coordinate their efforts with a family's pastor or spiritual caregiver. Along with a divinity degree and other advanced degrees, chaplains often have had special training in working with the ill and dying. Pastoral counselors have special training in counseling, as well as in divinity or theology. In teaching hospitals, they may be involved in teaching and training.

[cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org) | 1.800.227.2345