

Where You Go for Blood Cancer or Blood Disorder Treatment Matters

Ask these important questions to choose the right care for you

Treatment for cancerous and noncancerous blood disorders is complex. Many cancer centers offer state-of-the-art novel therapies, including CAR T-cell therapy, blood and marrow transplant, and other immunotherapies, and it can be difficult to choose the right one for you – especially with a serious diagnosis weighing on your mind and body. It is important to ask the following questions to learn important qualifications to help you make your choice with confidence.

Is your blood cancer program experienced?

Programs with experience deliver better outcomes. Look for a program that has performed a large volume of procedures. Look for a program with a dedicated staff – from physicians and nurses to coordinators and financial counselors, to nurse navigators, social workers, dietitians, onco-psychologists and more – that is entirely focused on diagnosing and treating cancerous and noncancerous blood disorders. You are entitled to receive treatment from a team that provides care and support for patients with conditions like yours every day.

Is your cancer center an NCI-designated cancer center? What does that mean for patients?

There are just 70 National Cancer Institute-designated cancer centers in the entire nation. Only truly premier organizations receive this exclusive distinction. Patients who receive care at an NCI-designated cancer center have access

to the best available treatments, resources and clinical trials and have a 25% greater chance of survival.

What conditions can be treated with blood and marrow transplantation?

Stem cell transplant is the leading treatment for a wide variety of cancerous and noncancerous blood disorders. Some of the most common include leukemia, lymphoma, multiple myeloma, aplastic anemia, bone marrow failure syndromes, plasma cell disorders, germ cell tumors (testicular), severe combined immune deficiency and sickle cell disease. Ask your prospective physician to discuss their experience with your specific disease type.

What types of transplants are there?

Transplants can be autologous – using the patient’s own cells. Or they can be allogeneic – which uses cells from a donor or from donated cord blood. Allogeneic transplants may be syngeneic (identical twins) or haploidentical (half matched).

Why are clinical trials important?

Some doctors not only provide world-class patient care, but also lead and participate in research and clinical trials designed to discover even more advanced treatments and cures. When you receive care at an NCI-designated cancer center, you have access to the newest treatment options often not available elsewhere. It’s an additional tool to help you beat your disease.



What if I need a donor?

Leading blood and marrow transplant programs provide complete support in seeking matched donors. The National Marrow Donor Program offers a registry its members can access. Look for a program offering experienced transplant nurse coordinators, helpful resources in locating matched donors for patients in need.

Will I need chemotherapy? What if I have side effects?

Your treatment plan will be unique to you, but most transplant care does include chemotherapy to reduce cancer cells and make room for your new stem cells to take hold and grow. Your care team should offer deep experience managing chemotherapy, transplant, CAR T-cell therapy and other immunotherapies and providing care to ease symptoms and side effects.

I hear that I'll have a lot of guidelines and restrictions to follow before and after my transplant. How can I be sure I'll understand it all?

When you receive a transplant, CAR T-cell therapy or immunotherapy, you receive a brand-new immune system. It will be extremely important to follow specific guidelines related to diet, hygiene and exposure to germs. Look for dedicated educators that teach specialized classes to prepare patients and caregivers for the lifestyle requirements transplants demand. You should expect access to resources devoted to ensuring you understand the expectations placed on you and how to follow them for your best possible outcome.

What roles should an overall blood and marrow transplant team include?

A comprehensive team offers broad and deep experience to provide care for patients receiving stem cell transplants. In addition to specialized transplant physicians and hematologists, the complete team includes an oncology psychologist, pre- and post-transplant nurse coordinators, specially trained social workers, financial coordinators, dietitians, physical therapists, palliative care specialists, fertility specialists and nurse practitioners. You may want to ask whether the program you're considering includes nurse navigators, a special position to help seamlessly guide patients through the complexities of cancer care.

Can I speak with other patients who have had transplants at your cancer center?

A formalized mentorship program to connect current and former patients and caregivers can be an invaluable resource as you prepare for and go through the transplant journey. Many former patients and caregivers volunteer their time to share information and provide support. Ask if this opportunity is available to you.

Get a second opinion

Schedule an appointment with a blood disorder specialist at The University of Kansas Cancer Center. Call **913-588-1227**.

