Asking the Right Questions

Here is some practice advice for anyone diagnosed with cancer.

March 16, 2020 By Bob Barnett

Vinayak K. Prasad, MD, MPH, a hematologist-oncologist and author of Malignant: How Bad Policy and Bad Evidence Harm People with Cancer (see "Spring Forward"), offers practical advice to anyone diagnosed with cancer:

Don't ask for a single prognosis percentage. "I always recommend asking for ranges, rather than absolute numbers," such as the 25th and 75th percentiles, he writes. "Knowing this range allows you to hope for the best while preparing for the worst."

Find out the purpose of your treatment. "In early visits, find out if the goal of treatment is to get rid of the cancer forever or merely slow its growth. It's fine to ask, 'What happens if I do nothing?'''

Save scans. "All information in the patient chart belongs to you. If you see a different physician, take these reports with you, but make sure you get them back before you leave."

Consider a second opinion. "It is never wrong to get a second opinion, but the best moments would be prior to starting the proposed treatment at diagnosis and at major treatment junctions, such as if the cancer progresses."

If there is no chance of cure, ask this. "If the treatment can't be expected to cure your cancer, ask, 'Is the potential upside of this drug or therapy worth the downsides?' Keep a log of your symptoms…the choice is always yours."

If treatment is curative, ask this. "If you get good news and your doctor recommends no further scans, ask about the long-term health risks from the treatment. Is there something you can do to mitigate that risk?"

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/asking-right-questions-cancer-diagnosis