The Dynamics of the Multi-Disciplinary Approach in Cancer

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The multi-disciplinary approach is extremely significant in the design of the treatment strategy in cancer. This approach is a dynamic process that begins with making the diagnosis and ends with the cure, or death, of the patient. At the time of initial diagnosis, multiple consultations with expert pathologists should be obtained. This is not only to confirm the diagnosis, but also to make certain that the exact nature and biological profile of the cancer are delineated. This is particularly important when the clinical presentation of the disease does not coincide with the pathological diagnosis. After the diagnosis is confirmed, the process of staging starts. Also, here multiple consultations with diagnostic radiology and pathology should be made to determine the exact stage of the disease. Treatment should never begin before the diagnosis is confirmed and stage is determined. Prior to treatment a group consultation must be obtained with diagnostic radiology, pathology, medical oncology, surgical oncology and radiation oncology. This specific multi-disciplinary consultation should be done while all the experts are physically present at the same time. During this consultation the experts review the imaging studies, pathology, laboratory studies together, and design the treatment strategy. This strategy should only be delineated after such a group consultation. A common problem is that these multi-disciplinary consultations are usually done sequentially whereby the patient sees every expert alone. This is not the proper way of implementing the multi-disciplinary approach. The expert group who formulates the strategy of therapy should reconvene regularly at every turn of treatment and after completing every phase of therapy. At all times they should be posted as to the progress of the patient. The key to the success of the multi-disciplinary approach is to make certain that there is one leader for the group, and that leader should be the treating physician who assumes responsibility for the care of the patient and for the implementation of the strategy of therapy.

The major objective of the multi-disciplinary approach is to make certain that the patient receives the best treatment that provides him with the best chance for cure. Also this approach provides the patient with psychological comfort and peace as he has not only obtained a second opinion, but many more.