Tumor Board Basics

What is a tumor board?

When you are diagnosed with cancer, the oncology (cancer) team makes a plan to treat your cancer. A biopsy (tissue sample) is used to find out what type of cancer you have. Radiology tests (CT scan, MRI, X-rays) are used to know the size and location of cancer. After reviewing the pathology report and other tests, the oncology team decides on the best treatment. Sometimes, the oncologist (cancer doctor) wants the input of other oncology team members. To do this, the patient’s case is discussed at a tumor board meeting.

A tumor board is a meeting where specialists (experts) from different areas of oncology get together. They talk about the diagnosis and treatment plan for a patient. Tumor board can go by many names. These include case conference, tumor conference, and multidisciplinary meetings.

Who takes part in tumor board?

There are many people who take part in tumor board. It is a “multidisciplinary” meeting, meaning people from many disciplines, or areas of healthcare, come together. These people may include:

- Medical oncologists.
- Radiation oncologists.
- Surgeons.
- Radiologists.
- Pathologists.
- Physical therapists.
- Speech therapists.
- Social workers.
- Nurses.
- Nurse practitioners or physician’s assistants.
- Genetics experts.

Other specialists (experts) may be there based on the type of cancer being discussed. These meetings can happen in person or virtually (online). Each cancer center has its own schedule on how often the tumor board meets.

What does a tumor board do?

The board talks about a patient’s test results and cancer diagnosis. Together they come up with a treatment plan. During the tumor board, everyone reviews the case together. They may look at the images taken (like x-rays, CT scans, or MRIs) and talk about the pathology findings or molecular testing. They may talk about other tests that need to be done. They also talk about possible treatments (like surgery, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, radiation, clinical trial). Each specialist shares their views so they can find the best plan for the patient.

Do all cancer cases need a tumor board meeting?

No. Sometimes a cancer diagnosis is clear, and treatment is easy to decide. Not all cancer diagnoses or treatment plans are this clear. There may be things that need to be kept in mind. These include the patient's other health issues, genetic changes, or family history. Getting the views of the tumor board experts can help an oncologist decide the best plan. This also makes
sure the treatment plan is individualized to the patient.