It’s Cancer. 
What’s Next?

Your first step may be the most important.

Facing a cancer diagnosis can be a life-changing event for you and your family, presenting important and sometimes overwhelming questions and decisions. The treatment choices you make first can make a difference in your outcome and your quality of life.

With rare exception, you and your family have time to sort through your options and carefully consider how best to proceed. But where to start?

Cancer is not one single disease but a collection of many different diseases and subtypes. When faced with this serious diagnosis, you should consider a variety of factors, including the range of treatment options and the level of expertise offered for your specific type of cancer.
Questions You Should Ask

The following is a list of questions you may want to ask about any hospital or cancer center that you are considering for your care:

How many cancer patients does this center treat?
The more cases that a center sees, the better it tends to be at treating them.

Does this center specialize in my type of cancer?
Because cancer is not one disease, it is important to find a specialist who understands and is experienced with YOUR cancer.

Does this center have teams of specialists in specific types of cancer who meet regularly to discuss cases (called tumor boards or conferences)?
Cancer treatment may involve a variety of specialties including surgery, oncology, radiation therapy, pathology, and others. Having your case reviewed by a team of specialists helps ensure that the diagnosis and the treatment plan will be accurate and the best for you.

If so, how specialized are these teams? What types of specialists are involved in these meetings?
Some hospitals or centers have general cancer tumor boards, where all types of cancer are considered. Others may have tumor boards that focus on specific types of cancer, i.e. a breast cancer tumor board, a lung cancer tumor board, etc.

What support services does this center provide? How will this center support my quality of life during and after treatment?
Treating a tumor is not enough. A cancer diagnosis presents physical, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual issues. Finding a center that offers support services in addition to medical treatment may provide a better experience for you and your family.

Is the center designated by the National Cancer Institute?
One of the federal government’s National Institutes of Health, the National Cancer Institute has designated a select few cancer centers as leaders in the field, based on a rigorous review process.

Is the center approved by the Commission on Cancer?
The Commission on Cancer is a group of professional organizations that reviews and monitors cancer programs to ensure that they provide quality care that meets or exceeds strict standards and guidelines.

Is this center accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations?
The Joint Commission is another organization that monitors, reviews and certifies that hospitals are compliant with strict standards of quality care and safety.

Is this center part of a Magnet hospital recognized for quality nursing care?
This program also includes rigorous review of the nursing environment and practices to measure the strength and quality of nursing care.

What new or innovative technologies or procedures does this center offer?
Cancer treatment is advancing at a rapid pace, but sometimes it takes years for new treatments to be adopted throughout the community.

Is this center covered by my health plan?
Cancer treatment can be expensive. Knowing what your plan covers and what it doesn’t can help you ensure that you are not faced with unexpected out-of-pocket costs. If you have questions about your insurance coverage at a particular hospital or center, ask to speak to a financial or billing counselor.
Where to turn for more information

The Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center offers a section on its website vicc.org/choose that offers information and links to additional resources to help you and your family as you make choices about cancer care.

The National Cancer Institute offers guidance about selecting a doctor or a treatment facility on its website at cancer.gov

You may want to start with the NCI’s list of designated centers at http://cancercenters.cancer.gov/cancer_centers/cancer-centers-names.html

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network is a non-profit alliance of 21 of the world’s leading cancer centers. They work in collaboration to improve the quality of care for cancer patients everywhere. The NCCN has developed a website especially for consumers nccn.com where you can learn about the latest treatment guidelines as well as the world’s leading cancer centers.

The American Cancer Society offers information about cancer centers and treatment services at cancer.org or (800) ACS-2345

Other Resources

The Commission on Cancer facs.org/cancer

The American Society of Clinical Oncology cancer.net including a “find an oncologist” searchable database

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations jointcommission.org and its section on quality indicators at qualitycheck.org

The American Board of Medical Specialties abms.org

About the Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center

Located in Nashville, Tenn., Vanderbilt-Ingram is the only cancer center in Tennessee ranked among the nation’s best by US News & World Report. Vanderbilt-Ingram is a leader in cancer research, treatment, education and prevention as a Comprehensive Cancer Center designated by the National Cancer Institute. It is also a member of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network, a group of 21 leading centers working together to improve quality and efficiency of cancer care. Its mission is to alleviate cancer death and suffering through pioneering research; innovative, patient-centered care; and evidence-based prevention, education and community activities.