

Chemotherapy/Radiation Transcript

Chemotherapy is a topic that I think is confusing for patients and families often because of pre-conceived notions they will have about chemotherapy. I think chemotherapy gets a bad name as something that will just make you sick and not help you. There is a risk after surgery that the cancer will come back. And that is why we have been working to try to discover better therapies for patients, and so now in addition to surgery we talk about things such as chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

I often tell patients though that chemotherapy has improved in all cancers to the point now that patients can get this in a safe environment and don't necessarily have to feel sick and bad. And what is important to understand and often surprises patients and families is that chemotherapy helps. And what I mean by that is when you take a patient who has discovered they have a type of situation where surgery is not going to be a realistic option and you don't give that patient any form of chemotherapy, and you take another patient who is in the same stage and everything else is similar and you take this other patient chemotherapy, the difference we know without question is that the patient who gets chemotherapy will live longer. Also, chemotherapy will improve the quality of that person's life. And I think that always sounds surprising – how could getting a treatment that would maybe make me sick, how could that improve the quality of my life? And it is because chemotherapy helps delay the growth of cancer.

There are many drugs out there and recipes of different types of therapies. What is important is that a person gets a treatment – whether it is Recipe A or Recipe B – that they are getting some treatment. That is what is important. That is better than not getting any treatment at all. The radiation is given by a radiation oncologist so it is not done in an office like where I work which is where chemotherapy is administered – in a medical oncologist's office. But a radiation oncologist is one of my colleagues who will administer radiation therapy.

Radiation therapy is also something that can be done in a way that doesn't have to make you feel bad. It is something that is daily, so you will receive radiation on a Monday through Friday type of schedule, but the treatments aren't long. It is not like you are spending hours in the clinic getting radiation therapy. Some patients will park their car, go in and get treatment early in the morning and come on out and go onto work. And they will do that for several weeks while they are finishing their therapy.