

ONCOLOGY 101 DICTIONARY

ACUTE: Symptoms or signs that begin and worsen quickly; not chronic.

*Example: James experienced **acute** vomiting after receiving his cancer treatments.*

ADENOCARCINOMA: Cancer that begins in glandular (secretory) cells. Glandular cells are found in tissue that lines certain internal organs and makes and releases substances in the body, such as mucus, digestive juices, or other fluids. Most cancers of the breast, pancreas, lung, prostate, and colon are adenocarcinomas.

*Example: The vast majority of rectal cancers are **adenocarcinomas**.*

ADENOMA: A tumor that is not cancer. It starts in gland-like cells of the epithelial tissue (thin layer of tissue that covers organs, glands, and other structures within the body).

*Example: Liver **adenomas** are rare but can be a cause of abdominal pain.*

ADJUVANT: Additional cancer treatment given after the primary treatment to lower the risk that the cancer will come back. Adjuvant therapy may include chemotherapy, radiation therapy, hormone therapy, targeted therapy, or biological therapy.

*Example: The decision to use **adjuvant** therapy often depends on cancer staging at diagnosis and risk factors of recurrence.*

BENIGN: Not cancerous. Benign tumors may grow larger but do not spread to other parts of the body. Also called nonmalignant.

*Example: Mary was relieved when her doctor said the mole on her skin was **benign** and did not require any further intervention.*

BIOMARKER TESTING: A group of tests that may be ordered to look for genetic alterations for which there are specific therapies available. The test results may identify certain cancer cells that can be treated with targeted therapies. May also be referred to as genetic testing, molecular testing, molecular profiling, or mutation testing.

*Example: Patients with breast cancer receive **biomarker testing** to help in clinical decision making.*

BIOPSY: The removal of cells or tissues for examination by a pathologist. The pathologist may study the tissue under a microscope or perform other tests on the cells or tissue. There are many different types of biopsy procedures. The most common types include: (1) incisional biopsy, in which only a sample of tissue is removed; (2) excisional biopsy, in which an entire lump or

suspicious area is removed; and (3) needle biopsy, in which a sample of tissue or fluid is removed with a needle. When a wide needle is used, the procedure is called a core biopsy. When a thin needle is used, the procedure is called a fine-needle aspiration biopsy.

*Example: Dr. Edwards scheduled me for a **biopsy** next week where he will take a sample and examine it for signs of disease*

BONE MARROW: The soft, sponge-like tissue in the center of most bones. It produces white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets.

*Example: After a kidney biopsy showed abnormalities in her blood, Ashley was referred to a hematologist-oncologist, who then biopsied her **bone marrow**.*

CARCINOID: A slow-growing type of tumor usually found in the gastrointestinal system (most often in the small intestine and rectum), and sometimes in the lungs or other sites. Carcinoid tumors may spread to the liver or other sites in the body, and they may secrete substances such as serotonin or prostaglandins, causing carcinoid syndrome

*Example: **Carcinoid** cancers have been called the 'good-looking' cancer, because patients often do not have symptoms.*

CARCINOMA: Cancer that begins in the skin or in tissues that line or cover internal organs.

*Example: Squamous cell **carcinoma** is a cancer of the skin that can develop from excess sun exposure.*

CARCINOMA of UNKNOWN PRIMARY: A case in which cancer cells are found in the body, but the place where the cells first started growing (the origin or primary site) cannot be determined. Also called cancer of unknown primary origin and CUP.

*Example: The carcinoma was not diagnosed until after it had metastasized to several other locations, therefore it was considered a **carcinoma of unknown primary**.*

CHEMOTHERAPY: Treatment that uses drugs to stop the growth of cancer cells, either by killing the cells or by stopping them from dividing. Chemotherapy may be given by mouth, injection, or infusion, or on the skin, depending on the type and stage of the cancer being treated. It may be given alone or with other treatments, such as surgery, radiation therapy, targeted therapy, or immunotherapy.

*Example: When cancer has metastasized, it often becomes inoperable and must be treated with **chemotherapy** to slow or reverse its growth.*

CHRONIC: A disease or condition that usually lasts for 3 months or longer and may get worse over time. Chronic diseases tend to occur in older adults and can usually be controlled but not cured. The most common types of chronic disease are cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and arthritis

*Example: Smokers often develop a **chronic** cough.*

CPT CODE: Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) is a medical code set used to report medical, surgical, and diagnostic procedures and services to healthcare providers, health insurance companies, and accrediting bodies. The American Medical Association (AMA) released the first CPT codes in 1966 and updates codes each year.

*Example: Is **CPT code 99473** new or revised effective January 1, 2020?*

CURATIVE: Surgery to remove all malignant (cancerous) tissue, which is meant to cure the disease. This includes removing part or all of the cancerous organ or tissue and a small amount of healthy tissue around it. Nearby lymph nodes may also be removed. Curative surgery works best for localized [limited to a certain part of the body] cancer. Chemotherapy or radiation therapy may be given before surgery to shrink the tumor or after surgery to kill any cancer cells that remain. Chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatments (with or without surgery) may also be curative.

*Example: Since my breast cancer has not metastasized, the surgeon expects my mastectomy to be **curative**.*

CYTOTOXIC: A substance that kills cells, including cancer cells. These agents may stop cancer cells from dividing and growing and may cause tumors to shrink in size.

*Example: Chemotherapy is **cytotoxic** to cancer cells and other living cells.*

DIAGNOSIS: The process of identifying a disease, condition, or injury from its signs and symptoms. A health history, physical exam, and tests, such as blood tests, imaging tests, and biopsies, may be used to help make a diagnosis.

*Example: The physician said she needed to run more tests to reach a **diagnosis**.*

DIAGNOSIS CODE: A diagnosis code is translation of written descriptions of a disease, illness, or injury into a unique set of letters and numbers. ICD-10 is the most common coding system used worldwide and in the United States.

*Example: The **ICD-10 diagnosis code** for Melanoma in situ of the lip is **D03.0**.*

DCIS: Ductal Carcinoma in Situ is a non-invasive breast cancer. Ductal means the cancer started inside the milk ducts. Having DCIS can increase the risk of developing an invasive breast cancer.

*Example: It is important to understand the follow-up recommendations after treatment for **DCIS**.*

EMBOLIZATION: A procedure that uses particles, such as tiny gelatin sponges or beads, to block a blood vessel. Embolization may be used to stop bleeding or to block the flow of blood to a tumor or abnormal area of tissue. It may be used to treat some types of liver cancer, kidney cancer, and neuroendocrine tumors. It may also be used to treat uterine fibroids, aneurysms, and other conditions. Types of embolization are arterial embolization, chemoembolization, and radioembolization.

*Example: The doctor recommended an **embolization** procedure in order to starve the cancer of blood and nutrients.*

FIRST-LINE TREATMENT: The first treatment given for a disease. It is often part of a standard set of treatments, such as surgery followed by chemotherapy and radiation. When used by itself, first-line therapy is the one accepted as the best treatment. If it doesn't cure the disease or it causes severe side effects, other treatment may be added or used instead. Also called induction therapy, primary therapy, and primary treatment.

*Example: The **first-line treatment** for hepatocellular carcinoma is a drug called Nexavar, but other drugs can be used as second-line therapies if that drug does not work.*

GENETIC: Having to do with genes. Most genes are sequences of DNA that contain information for making specific RNA molecules or proteins that perform important functions in a cell. The information in genes is passed down from parent to child. Sometimes, certain changes in genes can affect a person's risk of disease, such as cancer. These changes may be inherited, or they may occur with age or exposure to environmental factors, such as diet, exercise, drugs, and chemicals.

*Example: The nurse said that since my mother had breast cancer, I have an increased risk of breast cancer due to **genetics**.*

GENOMIC: The study of the complete set of DNA (including all of its genes) in a person or other organism. Almost every cell in a person's body contains a complete copy of the genome. The genome contains all the information needed for a person to develop and grow. Studying the genome may help researchers understand how genes interact with each other and with the environment and how certain diseases, such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, form. This may lead to new ways to diagnose, treat, and prevent disease.

*Example: Although **genomic** databases have led to advancements in cancer therapy, these databases are often skewed toward people of European descent.*

HETEROGENOUS: Derived from a different source or species. Also called heterogenic.

*Example: As cancer becomes more **heterogenous** it becomes more difficult to treat since the cells are diverse and respond differently to treatments.*

HOMOGENOUS: Derived from the same source or species. Of similar kind or nature.

*Example: Cancers are often more **homogenous** in early phases of disease but become more differentiated in later stages.*

HORMONE THERAPY: Treatment that adds, blocks, or removes hormones. For certain conditions (such as diabetes or menopause), hormones are given to adjust low hormone levels. Hormones can cause certain cancers (such as prostate and breast cancer) to grow. To slow or stop the growth of cancer, synthetic hormones or other drugs may be given to block the body's natural hormones. Sometimes surgery is needed to remove the gland that makes a certain hormone. Also called endocrine therapy, hormonal therapy, and hormone treatment.

*Example: Tamoxifen is a type of **hormone therapy** that blocks the action of estrogen at estrogen receptors.*

IMMUNOTHERAPY: A type of therapy that uses substances to stimulate or suppress the immune system to help the body fight cancer, infection, and other diseases. Some types of immunotherapy only target certain cells of the immune system. Others affect the immune system in a general way. Types of immunotherapy include immune checkpoint inhibitors, CAR-T cell therapy, cytokines, vaccines, bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG), and some monoclonal antibodies.

*Example: Melanoma is one of the most common kinds of cancer that respond to **immunotherapy** which helps white blood cells attack disease.*

INOPERABLE: Describes a condition that cannot be treated by surgery.

*Example: The brain tumor has spread rapidly, therefore the surgeon says it is **inoperable**.*

INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE: A type of medical care that combines conventional (standard) medical treatment with complementary and alternative (CAM) therapies that have been shown to be safe and to work. CAM therapies treat the mind, body, and spirit.

*Example: Mary wanted to explore **integrative medicine** approaches that combined chemotherapy with traditional Chinese medicine treatments and acupuncture.*

INVASIVE: A medical procedure that invades (enters) the body, usually by cutting or puncturing the skin or by inserting instruments into the body.

*Example: I am worried about undergoing an **invasive** procedure like a hysterectomy.*

J CODE: Medicare's coding system is called the Healthcare Common Procedural Coding System (HCPCS)—pronounced "hicks-picks". This system is used with the AMA's CPT coding system. J codes are a type of HCPCS code that is used for non-orally administered medication and chemotherapy drugs.

*Example: The CMS recently assigned a new **J Code** to Rituximab injections of J9312.*

LEIOMYOMA: A benign smooth muscle tumor, usually in the uterus or gastrointestinal tract. Also called fibroid.

Example: Although the uterine fibroid was considered a non-cancerous leiomyoma, it still caused Leah significant pain.

LOCALIZED CANCER: In medicine, describes disease that is contained in a certain part of the body (meaning it has not spread beyond that part). For example, localized cancer is usually found only in the tissue or organ in which it began and has not spread to nearby lymph nodes or to other parts of the body. Some localized cancers can be completely removed by surgery.

Example: The mass found in Mark's abdomen was determined to be a localized cancer that could be removed since it had not yet spread throughout other tissues.

MALIGNANT: Cancerous. Malignant cells can invade and destroy nearby tissue and may spread to other parts of the body.

Example: The doctor said that since my tumor is malignant, it will need to be treated with chemotherapy.

MELANOMA: A form of cancer that begins in melanocytes (cells that make the pigment melanin). It may begin in a mole (skin melanoma), but can also begin in other pigmented tissues, such as in the eye or in the intestines.

Example: The primary care doctor strongly encouraged all of his patients to perform self-examinations of their own skin to check for melanoma.

METASTASIS: The spread of cancer cells from the place where they first formed to another part of the body. In metastasis, cancer cells break away from the original (primary) tumor, travel through the blood or lymph system, and form a new tumor in other organs or tissues of the body. The new, metastatic tumor is the same type of cancer as the primary tumor. For example, if breast cancer spreads to the lung, the cancer cells in the lung are breast cancer cells, not lung cancer cells. The plural form of metastasis is metastases (meh-TAS-tuh-SEEZ).

Example: The nurse said my lung cancer metastasized to the brain.

NEOADJUVANT: Treatment given as a first step to shrink a tumor before the main treatment, which is usually surgery, is given. Examples of neoadjuvant therapy include chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and hormone therapy. It is a type of induction therapy.

Example: The surgical oncologist recommends a course of neoadjuvant therapy to shrink the cancer so that less tissue needed to be removed during surgery.

NEUTROPENIA: A condition in which there is a lower-than-normal number of neutrophils (a type of white blood cell) in the blood.

*Example: I need to be extra careful to practice good hygiene and prevent infection since I have **neutropenia**.*

NON-INVASIVE: In medicine, it describes a procedure that does not require inserting an instrument through the skin or into a body opening. In cancer, it describes disease that has not spread outside the tissue in which it began.

*Example: A pelvic ultrasound is a **non-invasive** procedure since the probe just rests on top of the skin. Basal cell carcinoma is usually a **non-invasive** cancer.*

PALLIATIVE CARE/PALLIATION: Care given to improve the quality of life of patients who have a serious or life-threatening disease. The goal of palliative care is to prevent or treat as early as possible the symptoms of a disease, side effects caused by treatment of a disease, and psychological, social, and spiritual problems related to a disease or its treatment. Also called comfort care, supportive care, and symptom management.

*Example: Since I do not expect to cure my cancer, I would like to discuss **palliative care** to ensure the rest of my life is as enjoyable as possible.*

PLACEBO: An inactive substance or other intervention that looks the same as, and is given the same way as, an active drug or treatment being tested. The effects of the active drug or other intervention are compared to the effects of the placebo.

*Example: In randomized control trials, some people receive an experimental treatment, and some people receive a **placebo**.*

PRECANCEROUS: A term used to describe a condition that may (or is likely to) become cancer. Also called premalignant.

*Example: The dermatologist recommended removing the mole since it appeared **precancerous** and did not want to risk it developing into a cancer.*

PRIMARY CANCER: A term used to describe the original, or first, tumor in the body. Cancer cells from a primary cancer may spread to other parts of the body and form new, or secondary, tumors. This is called metastasis. These secondary tumors are the same type of cancer as the primary cancer. Also called primary tumor.

*Example: The cancer spread from the skin to the lungs, the cancer in the skin was considered a **primary cancer**.*

PROGNOSIS: The likely outcome or course of a disease; the chance of recovery or recurrence.

*Example: Some cancers have a more favorable **prognosis** than others.*

RADIATION THERAPY: The use of high-energy radiation from x-rays, gamma rays, neutrons, protons, and other sources to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors. Radiation may come from a machine outside the body (external-beam radiation therapy), or it may come from radioactive material placed in the body near cancer cells (internal radiation therapy or brachytherapy). Systemic radiation therapy uses a radioactive substance, such as a radiolabeled monoclonal antibody, that travels in the blood to tissues throughout the body. Also called irradiation and radiotherapy.

*Example: The nurse counseled Aaron that **radiation therapy** may cause a rash near the site of treatment.*

RECURRENCE: Cancer that has recurred (come back), usually after a period of time during which the cancer could not be detected. The cancer may come back to the same place as the original (primary) tumor or to another place in the body. Also called recurrent cancer.

*Example: Hodgkin lymphoma has a high cure rate with a **recurrence** rate of 10%-13%.*

REFRACTORY: In medicine, describes a disease or condition that does not respond to treatment.

*Example: The doctor recommended an experimental treatment when the cancer proved **refractory** to conventional therapies.*

REGIMEN: A treatment plan that specifies the dosage, the schedule, and the duration of treatment.

*Example: My treatment **regimen** is complicated, but my nurse helps make sure I take medications on time.*

RELAPSE: The return of a disease or the signs and symptoms of a disease after a period of improvement. Relapse also refers to returning to the use of an addictive substance or behavior, such as cigarette smoking.

*Example: When Paul began feeling aching in his joints after initially improving, he became concerned about **relapse**.*

REMISSION: A decrease in or disappearance of signs and symptoms of cancer. In partial remission, some, but not all, signs and symptoms of cancer have disappeared. In complete remission, all signs and symptoms of cancer have disappeared, although cancer still may be in the body.

*Example: Heather celebrated her fifth year of being in **remission** and hoped to remain cancer free for the rest of her life.*

SARCOMA: A type of cancer that begins in bone or in the soft tissues of the body, including cartilage, fat, muscle, blood vessels, fibrous tissue, or other connective or supportive tissue. Different types of sarcoma are based on where the cancer forms. For example, osteosarcoma forms in bone, liposarcoma forms in fat, and rhabdomyosarcoma forms in muscle. Treatment and

prognosis depend on the type and grade of the cancer (how abnormal the cancer cells look under a microscope and how quickly the cancer is likely to grow and spread). Sarcoma occurs in both adults and children.

*Example: Liposarcoma is one of the most common types of **sarcoma**, originates in fat cells, and often presents as a painless mass around the abdominal area.*

SECOND-LINE TREATMENT: Treatment that is given when initial treatment (first-line therapy) doesn't work or stops working.

*Example: Nivolumab is an immunotherapy that is often prescribed as a **second-line treatment** for melanoma that has not responded to first-line treatment or if the disease comes back after completing first-line treatment.*

SECONDARY CANCER: A term used to describe cancer that has spread (metastasized) from the place where it first started to another part of the body. Secondary cancers are the same type of cancer as the original (primary) cancer. For example, cancer cells may spread from the breast (primary cancer) to form new tumors in the lung (secondary cancer). The cancer cells in the lung are just like the ones in the breast. Also called secondary tumor. Secondary cancers can also be used to describe a second, different type of cancer that the patient develops.

*Example: The cancer spread from the skin to the lungs, the cancer in the lungs was considered a **secondary cancer**.*

STAGING: Performing exams and tests to learn the extent of the cancer within the body, especially whether the disease has spread from where it first formed to other parts of the body. It is important to know the stage of the disease in order to plan the best treatment.

*Example: The doctor said the MRI will help in **staging** the cancer, so we know what treatment is best.*

STANDARD of CARE: Treatment that is accepted by medical experts as a proper treatment for a certain type of disease and that is widely used by healthcare professionals. Also called best practice, standard medical care, and standard therapy.

*Example: The **standard of care** for metastatic pancreatic cancer involves one of two chemotherapy regimens.*

TARGETED THERAPY: A type of treatment that uses drugs or other substances to identify and attack specific types of cancer cells with less harm to normal cells. Some targeted therapies block the action of certain enzymes, proteins, or other molecules involved in the growth and spread of cancer cells. Other types of targeted therapies help the immune system kill cancer cells or deliver toxic substances directly to cancer cells and kill them. Targeted therapy may have fewer side effects

than other types of cancer treatment. Most targeted therapies are either small molecule drugs or monoclonal antibodies.

*Example: Mark wanted to explore **targeted therapies** rather than chemotherapy because he was concerned about experiencing side effects.*

The **Association of Community Cancer Centers (ACCC)** is the leading education and advocacy organization for the cancer care community. Founded in 1974, ACCC is a powerful network of 25,000 multidisciplinary practitioners from 2,100 hospitals and practices nationwide. As advances in cancer screening and diagnosis, treatment options, and care delivery models continue to evolve—so has ACCC—adapting its resources to meet the changing needs of the entire oncology care team. For more information, visit acc-cancer.org or call 301.984.9496. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn; read our blog, ACCCBuzz; and tune in to our podcast, CANCER BUZZ.

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