WHAT IS A MEDICAL ONCOLOGIST?

A medical oncologist is a physician specialized in treating cancer by giving medications including chemotherapy, targeted therapy and hormone therapy.

**CHEMOTHERAPY**
Chemotherapy involves giving medication that attacks cancer cells. It can be given before surgery, after surgery, or on its own. It is also used to help prevent breast cancer from returning anywhere in your body. Your medical oncologist will decide if chemotherapy is right for you, depending on the size of your tumor and where it has spread.

**HOW CHEMOTHERAPY WORKS**
Chemotherapy is designed to kill cancer cells. This is called *systemic therapy*. It travels in the bloodstream throughout your body. Chemotherapy stops the life cycle of cancer cells. Then the cancer dies.

**DURING TREATMENT**
Chemotherapy is usually an outpatient treatment. It is given in the Infusion Center on the first floor of Smilow. The length of each treatment may differ depending on whether you take the medication in pill form, through an IV (intravenous) line, or both. Treatment is given in cycles, which may occur every 2 to 5 weeks.

**HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO RECEIVE CHEMOTHERAPY?**
Chemotherapy treatments given by IV may last up to 4 hours, depending on the medication used. Between treatments your body has a chance to recover. The course of treatment often lasts 3 to 6 months. Your medical oncologist will help you to choose the best agents for your type of cancer.

**HOW SHOULD I DRESS FOR CHEMOTHERAPY?**
Dress comfortably for chemotherapy treatment. You may want to bring layers of clothing to put on in case you get cold.
**Targeted Therapy**
There is a newer class of chemotherapeutic agents referred to as targeted therapies. Targeted therapies do not attack healthy, normal cells in the body. These new agents work to stop the growth of a tumor by interfering with over-expressed growth factors found on cancer cells and, therefore, these are drugs used only for specific cancers. Talk to your doctor about whether they are part of your treatment. It is also important to discuss with your physician, nurse, and pharmacist all the medications you are taking as there may be drug interactions with the targeted therapies.

**Hormone Therapy**
Hormone therapy works by depriving cancer cells of the hormones they need to grow. Hormone therapy is also used to kill existing cancer cells and to keep cancer from coming back.

**How Hormone Therapy Works**
Hormone therapy attacks cancer cells throughout the body (*systemic therapy*). It is used in patients whose cancer cells respond to estrogen or progesterone. The hormones bind to special sites on the breast cancer cells (receptors), causing them to grow. During treatment, medications, like *tamoxifen*, bind to these sites instead. This inhibits the cancer cells and keeps them from dividing. Other medications, called aromatase inhibitors, reduce the body’s production of estrogen. The less estrogen there is to bind to, the less likely cancer cells are to grow.

**During Treatment**
Your doctor will give you a prescription for hormone therapy. You will need to take pills daily for at least five years. During this time, your doctor will want to monitor your progress. You will be told how often to schedule your office visits.