

# Being on a Clinical Pathway: The Basic Facts

## Putting a Spotlight on Clinical Pathways

Decisions about cancer treatment are increasingly being influenced by what is called a “clinical pathway”. Yet, most Americans know nothing about this process. To change this situation, here are the basic facts about pathways and how they can influence your care.

## Clinical Pathways Defined

In simple terms, clinical pathways chart the specific steps in treating a disease based on medical evidence. They guide doctors in managing a patient’s care from diagnosis through surgery, drug therapy, and supportive care, and are developed by hospitals, physician practices, and health insurance plans.

## What It Means to Be on a Clinical Pathway

Clinical pathways lay out different treatment regimens at every stage of cancer care and specify the names of the drugs, dosing levels, and schedule for administration. They also influence the decisions doctors make about the timing of laboratory tests and scans. As a result, pathways, to a large degree, determine what treatment options are available to patients.

## Not All Pathways Are the Same

The reality is that not all pathways are the same. Some are patient-focused and allow doctors and patients to weigh different treatment options, including access to clinical trials. Others limit choices to a predetermined checklist of tests and drug regimens or require prior authorization from the health plan if the oncologist opts for a different treatment. In light of these differences, finding out what is covered by the pathway that governs your care is a valuable first step in choosing your course of therapy.

## Tips for Getting the Facts

Today, it is more important than ever to ask your doctor if your care will be determined by a clinical pathway. If the answer is yes, be sure to ask:

- What treatment options are available through the pathway for my diagnosis?
- Does the pathway include the option of enrolling in a clinical trial?
- Is there a way to go on a treatment regimen not covered through the clinical pathway?
- Who developed the pathway?

Other ways to get information about treatments covered through a clinical pathway are to:

- Visit the insurer’s website to review the list of prescriptions the plan includes.
- Call the insurance company directly to find out what drugs are covered.

In short, do your research and don’t be afraid to ask questions. You have a right to know what treatment options are available and how the pathway governs your care.