

CONTENTS

What to Know Before You Go

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While some patients are intent on traveling wherever their best hope lies within the United States, anyone considering travel should do preliminary research since treatment for many cancers is standard and does not necessitate specialty care, and traveling can add many stressors.

Interview both your local oncologist and social worker and an oncologist or social worker at the facility where you plan to go to see if it will provide something substantially different from treatment near home.

An alternative for patients who are physically, logistically, or mentally unable to travel for treatment is telemedicine—using the telephone and computer to consult with health professionals outside your area. These experts can validate the treatment planned by your local team, offer a second opinion, or recommend a different protocol that your team is willing to follow. In many cases, oncologists are willing to work together for your care.

If you feel well enough to travel and have determined that the best care necessitates it, the National Cancer Institute offers suggestions on selecting the right facility at www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Therapy/doctor-facility.

Also, consider a destination based on where your extended family or friends live. They may be a valuable support network, and in some cases, provide housing, meals, and transportation to the hospital.

Finding affordable housing or financial support for distant care becomes an essential part of the equation. Here are some resources to explore:

> Some states' **Medicaid programs** pay for temporary lodging if a patient has to travel for treatment. Private insurers also may include travel and lodging benefits. Check your state's requirements and review your health insurance coverage.

> **The National Association of Hospital Hospitality Houses** (www.nahhh.org) helps patients and their families locate housing around the country. Make sure you understand all the conditions and policies before leaving home.

> **The American Cancer Society's Hope Lodges** offer free housing to patients and caregivers in 26 areas with an average length of stay of six to eight weeks. Accommodations and eligibility requirements vary by location and include the patient having a caregiver at least 18 years old with them at all times. To find a Hope Lodge,

call 800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.

> **Ronald McDonald House Charities** provides housing for families of seriously ill children receiving treatment at nearby hospitals. Visit www.rmhc.org for more information.

> **Joe's House** (www.joeshouse.org) is a lodging guide for cancer patients and caregivers. "We now have over 1,230 places to stay listed on the site in 46 states and over 80 cities," says Ann W. Calahan, who launched the online resource with her second husband, Don Calahan, in 2003. Her first husband, Joe Warnecke, died in 1997 of liposarcoma. While Joe battled the disease for six years, he and Ann had difficulty finding appropriate accommodations in unfamiliar cities.

> **Hospitality Homes** is a Boston-area program whose volunteers open their living quarters to patients in need of lodging. A personal reference is required, and patients must be accompanied by a friend or family member. Call 888-595-4678 or visit www.hosp.org for details.

> **The Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation** has established the Mary and Bob Cosentino Travel Grant Program to help newly diagnosed patients afford the travel and lodging costs to consult with an expert on the asbestos-related cancer. To apply, call 805-563-8400 or visit www.cureMeso.org.

> **The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society** offers supplementary financial assistance for transportation and other costs to patients in significant financial need through its Patient Financial Aid program (a Co-Pay Assistance program is also available). Visit www.leukemia-lymphoma.org for more information.