

Top Tips – Dr Mark Taylor

I'm Mark Taylor. I'm a consultant hepatobiliary and general surgeon in the Belfast Trust. My area of expertise is cancer surgery relating to the liver, gall bladder and pancreas.

I think it's important that carers come along to the consultations with their loved ones, if the loved one gives permission. That way, the carer can hear the same information that's being given to the loved one. Information, there is a vast amount of, but particularly the hints for the carer would be where can they access support because, quite often, the carer feels very lonely, very much isolated, and they need that support, and there's a vast amount of support for carers of cancer patients. Macmillan have information centres in the big hospitals in Northern Ireland. They are drop-in centres. They can give advice on a range of issues. In my particular area, we have a clinical nurse-specialists, and in fact, in most cancer areas, they are clinical nurse-specialists and they have a valuable job at being that missing link between the patient and the clinician looking after the patient.

I think it's very important to say to carers not to be frightened to stop a consultation and ask questions to get an understanding. Sometimes, in a busy clinic, clinicians can go into medical jargon and big words, and I think it's highly appropriate for a carer, or indeed the patient themselves, to ask for clarification, ask to explain what that actually means to them, and certainly, clinical nurse-specialists will have more time during the consultations to spend that period going into the explanation in a much simpler way.

I think it's very important that a carer looks after themselves principally. If they're not looking after themselves, it's going to be very difficult for them to look after their loved one because the journey ahead may be very troubled, there may be ups and downs, and I would advice carers to, first of all, make sure that they have time, time for themselves, make sure there is family support and friends that are there to support them, maybe even to give them that 20 or 30 minute break in the day to go for a walk, to go out to the shops, to do something for themselves. Quite often, they feel guilty about taking time-out for themselves, they maybe aren't sleeping as well, they're concentrating on their loved one's meals and maybe not eating themselves, and they're generally becoming run-down as a result of that. So, I know that, sometimes, it seems to be the wrong thing to do, but in order to be an effective carer for their loved ones, they've really got to look after themselves too.