**CANCER TERMS**

**Benign:** describes an abnormal growth that is stable, treatable and generally not life-threatening.

**Biopsy:** the removal of a small amount of tissue for examination under a microscope. Other tests can suggest that cancer is present, but only a biopsy can make a definite diagnosis.

**Invasive cancer:** cancer that has spread outside the layer of tissue in which it started and has the potential to grow into other tissues or parts of the body, also called infiltrating cancer.

**Malignant:** refers to a tumour that is cancerous. It may invade nearby healthy tissue or spread to other parts of the body.

**Mass:** a lump in the body.

**Metastasis:** the spread of cancer from the place where it started to another part of the body. Cancer cells can break away from the primary tumour and travel through the blood or the lymphatic system to the lymph nodes, brain, lungs, bones, liver or other organs. If the cancer has spread, the doctor may say it has “metastasized.”

**Neoplasm:** any new and abnormal growth, specifically one in which cell multiplication is uncontrolled and progressive. Neoplasms may be benign or malignant.

**Precancerous:** refers to cells that have the potential to become cancerous.

**Primary cancer:** describes the original cancer.

**Recurrence:** the development of cancerous cells in the same area or another area of the body after cancer treatment.

**Secondary cancer:** describes either a new primary cancer (a different type of cancer) that develops after treatment for the first type of cancer, or cancer that has spread to other parts of the body from the place where it started.

**The TNM staging system**

TNM stands for Tumour, Node, Metastasis. This system describes the size of the initial cancer (the primary tumour), whether the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes, and whether it has spread to a different part of the body (metastasised). The system uses letters and numbers to describe the cancer:

* **T** refers to the size of the cancer and how far it has spread into nearby tissue – it can be 1, 2, 3 or 4, with 1 being small and 4 large.
* **N** refers to whether the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes – it can be between 0 (no lymph nodes containing cancer cells) and 3 (lots of lymph nodes containing cancer cells)
* **M** refers to whether the cancer has spread to another part of the body – it can either be 0 (the cancer hasn't spread) or 1 (the cancer has spread)

The letter c is sometimes used before the letters TNM. For example, cT2. This stands for clinical stage. It means that the stage is based on what the doctor knows about the cancer before surgery. Doctors may look at your tests results and use the clinical information from examining you.

**Number staging systems**

Number staging systems usually use the TNM system to divide cancers into stages. Most types of cancer have 4 stages, numbered from 1 to 4. Often doctors write the stage down in Roman numerals. So, you may see stage 4 written down as stage IV.

Here is a brief summary of what the stages mean for most types of cancer:

**Stage 1** usually means that a cancer is relatively small and contained within the organ it started in

**Stage 2** usually means that the tumour is larger than in stage 1, but the cancer has not started to spread into the surrounding tissues. Sometimes stage 2 means that cancer cells have spread into lymph nodes close to the tumour. This depends on the particular type of cancer

**Stage 3** usually means the cancer is larger. It may have started to spread into surrounding tissues and there are cancer cells in the lymph nodes in the area

**Stage 4** means the cancer has spread from where it started to another body organ. This is also called secondary or metastatic cancer

**Carcinoma in situ**

Carcinoma in situ is sometimes called stage 0 cancer or 'in situ neoplasm'. It means that there is a group of abnormal cells in an area of the body. The cells may develop into cancer at some time in the future. The changes in the cells are called dysplasia. The number of abnormal cells is too small to form a tumour. Some doctors and researchers call these cell changes 'precancerous changes' or 'non invasive cancer'. But many areas of carcinoma in situ will never develop into cancer.