



## Stem cell transplant at a hospital in the United States: What you need to know

For patients, donors, caregivers and family members who are considering an out-of-country stem cell transplant

### Key points:

- At this time there is a wait to get a stem cell transplant at hospitals in Ontario.
- To get your transplant sooner, as it is medically necessary, your Ontario physician may discuss with you the need for an application to be submitted to the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) for funding to receive your transplant in the U.S.
- Having your transplant sooner may give you a better chance at living longer. Choosing to wait for your transplant in Ontario could mean risking your life.

This booklet has information to help you learn more about going to the U.S. for a Transplant, including:

- Quick U.S. Essentials Checklist
- Things to know before getting a transplant in the U.S.
- Information for caregivers and related donors
- Checklists of things you need to do for patients, caregivers and related donors



### Quick U.S. Essentials Checklist:

- ☐ Out-of-Country Approval Letter
- ☐ Caregiver
- ☐ Valid Passports
- ☐ Emergency Travel Medical Insurance
- ☐ Medications
- ☐ U.S. Money and Credit Card

### Important to Note:

Valid passports, emergency travel medical insurance and medications are needed for both you and your caregiver. If your transplant is from a related donor, then the donor would also need these items too.



## Things to know before your transplant

### **Why would I go to a hospital in the U.S. to have my stem cell transplant?**

If you are being offered a stem cell transplant in the U.S. it is because:

- You have a life-threatening disease and you need a stem cell transplant.
- You will have to wait for a stem cell transplant in Ontario.

Waiting too long for a stem cell transplant is dangerous. During the wait:

- You may need extra rounds of chemotherapy and other treatments to keep your cancer under control.
- Your cancer could get worse and then you may no longer be able to have a stem cell transplant.

### **Getting your stem cell transplant as soon as your doctor says you are ready is the best way to treat your cancer.**

- Many people from Ontario have had their stem cell transplants in the U.S.
- Stem cell transplants in the U.S. are the same as in Canada. U.S. hospitals are well-run and offer the same high-quality care as hospitals in Ontario.

Though it might be best for your health, you do not have to go to the U.S. for your transplant. You can choose to wait longer for your transplant in Ontario. Talk to your doctors about how waiting longer may affect your health.

### **Which U.S. hospital will I go to?**

Your referring doctor can choose one of these three hospitals for your transplant:

- Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo, New York
- Karmanos Cancer Centre in Detroit, Michigan
- Taussig Cancer Institute at Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland Ohio

Your doctor will talk to you about which hospital you go to and you can help to make the decision. Most patients go to the hospital that is closest to their home.



## Do I have to pay to have my stem cell transplant in the U.S?

- You **do not** have to pay any of the medical costs for your stem cell transplant.
- You may have to pay for some of your non-medical costs. You would also have to pay for many of these costs if you have your transplant in Ontario.
- Staff at the U.S. hospital will help you find low-cost or no-cost options for most things like hotels and services.

Here is a list of some of the things you may need to pay for:

- Travel costs (airfare and/or gas)
- Food outside the hospital
- Lodging/hotel/housing after you leave the hospital
- Emergency travel medical insurance for health problems that aren't related to your stem cell transplant (like a car accident)
- Cell phone costs

Talk to your Ontario or U.S. health care team to learn more about what you might have to pay for to get a better idea of costs.

## Do I have to get approval to go to the U.S. for my stem cell transplant?

- Yes. The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) has to give approval before you can have a stem cell transplant in the U.S.
- Your Ontario hospital will arrange this approval for you.
- Getting the approval from the MOHLTC takes about 24 hours from when it is sent in.
- Once your application is approved, a MOHLTC staff person will contact you by phone.
- You will also get a copy of the approval letter by courier (Purolator) to your home. This letter is important so make sure you keep it safe.

## How quickly will everything happen once I get the approval?

- The U.S. hospital will contact you a few days after your approval comes through.
- How quickly you need to go to the U.S. hospital will be different for each patient. You may leave as soon as a few days after hearing from the U.S. hospital.



### **How much will my Ontario health care team know about my stem cell transplant?**

- Your Ontario doctors be kept up-to-date about how you are doing at the U.S. hospital.
- They will need to know details so that they can care for you once you come home to Ontario.

### **How long will I be in the U.S. in total?**

- You should plan to be in the U.S. for 100 days.
- How long you have to stay will depend on your treatment centre's rules, how you do after your transplant and how much follow-up care you need.



## During and after your transplant

### Hospital stay

- You will stay in the hospital during your transplant and for some time after your transplant.
- The amount of time you spend in the hospital will depend on which hospital you choose and how you do after the transplant.
- It is usually about 30 days.

### After your hospital stay

- When you leave the hospital you will stay somewhere close while you continue to recover.
- The U.S. hospital staff will help you find a place to stay.
- Usually patients stay at local hotels or lodges with kitchenettes.
- You will stay close by the U.S. hospital for about 70 days so that you can go to appointments at the hospital where you had your transplant. You will have to go to appointments many times a week at first. The number of appointments will go down as you get better and stronger.

### Going home

- Once your U.S. health care team thinks you are ready, you can come home to Ontario.
- Your care will be transferred back to an Ontario hospital for follow-up.
- Your health care team in Ontario will contact you to tell you what will happen when you come back.

**Please see the attached information sheets to learn more about each U.S. hospital.**



## Checklist for patients

### Passport and travel documents

#### If you are a Canadian citizen:

- ☐ Check to make sure that your Canadian passport is valid.
  - If you do not have a passport or if it is out of date, you can ask for an urgent/emergency passport application at a Passport Canada office.
  - Call 1-800-567-6868 or visit [www.cic.gc.ca/english/passport/](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/passport/) for more information.

#### If you are a Permanent Resident of Canada

- ☐ Check to make sure that your passport from your country of citizenship is valid.
- ☐ **Check to see if you need a visa to travel to the U.S.**
  - Citizens of some countries need a visa to travel to the U.S. Other countries are part of the Visa Waiver Program, which means citizens do not need a visa for U.S. travel.
  - Check the list of countries in the Visa Waiver Program here: <https://www.dhs.gov/visa-waiver-program-requirements>

#### For everyone

- ☐ If you have children under the age of 18 who will be crossing the border without both parents/guardians, make sure they have a written letter from both parents that gives permission for travel. Here is a sample letter for use: <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/children/consent-letter>
- ☐ Bring your approval letter with you. You may need to show the letter at the border.

### Insurance

- ☐ Buy emergency travel medical insurance if you do not have it through your workplace benefits.
- ☐ Contact your insurance provider if you have Short Term or Long Term Disability through your workplace benefits. Tell them that:
  - You have been approved by the MOHLTC to get a stem cell transplant in the U.S.
  - You will be traveling to the U.S. for your treatment and will be there for 100 days



- You can give them a copy of your approval letter if they need it
- While it is not expected, you may want to ask about insurance products that can pay for costs if you should die while in the U.S. These products are usually valid for life and will cover you for vacations and business travel in the future. Some patients have found that this insurance gives them peace of mind. Ask your health care team if they know of a provider if you want to learn more.

## Financial

- Call your bank and credit card companies to make sure they know you will be traveling to the U.S. Do this so that they do not freeze your account when they see charges from the U.S.
- Ask your bank about fees to use bank machines in the U.S.
- If you get Employment Insurance (EI) Sickness Benefits, give Service Canada a copy of your approval letter from the MOHLTC so that you can keep getting your benefits while in the U.S. **Do this before you travel to the U.S.**
- Keep all of your receipts for travel, accommodation, food and other costs. You may be able to claim them as medical expenses on your next tax return to get a refund on part of the cost.
- Patients who live in Northern Ontario may be able to get a travel grant under the Northern Health Travel Grant (NHTG) Program. For more information on this program, please visit this website:  
<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/publications/ohip/northern.aspx>.
- Get some U.S. dollars before you travel, to pay for food and other costs while you are in the U.S.

## Practical

- Contact a lawyer to:
  - Complete a Power of Attorney for Personal Care form (POA-PC) or request a POA-PC kit from your social worker. Bring your Power of Attorney forms to the U.S. hospital. These forms tell your health care team who will make your decisions if you are not able to
  - Update your will, if you need to
- Contact your cell phone provider and ask about travel packages. You may also have your cell phone unlocked and buy pay-as-you-go plans in the U.S.



- ☐ Contact Canada Post to have your mail sent to your address in the U.S. or ask a family member or friend to collect your mail for you and tell you about bills that need to be paid.

## Medication

- ☐ Get a 3-4 month supply of medications that you take regularly (like blood pressure pills). Bring your medications in the bottles they came in.
- ☐ Get a letter from the doctor who prescribed it about the need for the medication. You must tell border services about all medications you are bringing to the U.S.



## Caregivers

Every patient who goes to the U.S. for a stem cell transplant must have an adult to help care for them once they leave the hospital. The need for a caregiver is the same for patients who receive their stem cell transplant in Ontario. The caregiver does not have to be there while you are in the hospital, though many patients will choose to have a caregiver the whole time.

If you do not have anyone who can be your caregiver after your transplant, talk to your Ontario health care team.

### Key points for caregivers:

- Your caregiver should not be responsible for anyone else (like a child) while caring for you.
- Your caregiver does not have to be the same person the whole time. Friends and family members can take turns caring for you.
- Your caregiver must be physically strong and able to take care of you. They must be able to help with things like dressing and bathing and giving you medications. They will also be doing things like cooking, cleaning, shopping and laundry.
- Your caregiver is expected to come with you to all appointments and will be trained by hospital staff to do things like dressing care and intravenous (IV) flushing.
- Your caregivers must pay for some things while they are in the U.S., like travel, cell phone costs and food.
- Your caregiver must share your lodging with you but can sleep in a separate bed or bedroom.
- Your caregivers should buy emergency travel medical insurance in case they need medical care while in the U.S.



## Checklist for Caregivers

### Passport and travel documents

#### If you are a Canadian citizen:

- ☐ Check to make sure that your Canadian passport is valid.
  - If you do not have a passport or if it is out of date, you can ask for an urgent/emergency passport application at a Passport Canada office.
  - Call 1-800-567-6868 or visit [www.cic.gc.ca/english/passport/](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/passport/) for more information.

#### If you are a Permanent Resident of Canada

- ☐ Check to make sure that your passport from your country of citizenship is valid.
- ☐ **Check to see if you need a visa to travel to the U.S.**
  - Citizens of some countries need a visa to travel to the U.S. Other countries are part of the Visa Waiver Program, which means citizens do not need a visa for U.S. travel.

Check the list of countries in the Visa Waiver Program here:  
<https://www.dhs.gov/visa-waiver-program-requirements>

### Insurance

- ☐ Buy emergency travel medical insurance if you do not have it through your workplace benefits.

### Financial

- ☐ Call your bank and credit card companies to make sure they know you will be traveling to the U.S. so that they do not freeze your account when they see international charges.
- ☐ Ask your bank about fees to use bank machines in the U.S.
- ☐ Get some U.S. dollars before you travel to pay for food and other costs while you get settled in the U.S.

### Medication

- ☐ Get a 3-4 month supply of medications that you take regularly (like blood pressure pills). Pack medications in the bottles they came in.
- ☐ Get a letter from the doctor who prescribed it about the need for the medication. You must tell border services about all medications you are bringing to the United States.



## Related Donors

If you have a family member who will be your stem cell donor they must go with you to the U.S. hospital to make the donation. They will stay there for about one week while they have tests and have the stem cells harvested.

All medical costs for your stem cell donor are paid for.

### Key points for donors:

- Your donor does not need to live in Ontario or have OHIP (Ontario Health Insurance Plan) coverage as long as you have been approved by the Ministry of Health to get your stem cell transplant in the U.S.
- **Donors must have a valid passport and be able to travel to both Canada and the U.S.**
- Donors must pay for their expenses while in the U.S. (such as travel and cell phone costs)
- Donors should buy emergency medical insurance in case they need medical care while in the U.S.
- Speak to the U.S. hospitals about accommodations for donors while in the U.S.



## Checklist for Donors

### Passport and travel documents

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  - Call 1-800-567-6868 or visit [www.cic.gc.ca/english/passport/](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/passport/) for more information.

#### If you are a Permanent Resident of Canada

- ☐ Check to make sure that your passport from your country of citizenship is valid.
- ☐ **Check to see if you need a visa to travel to the U.S.**
  - Citizens of some countries need a visa to travel to the U.S. Other countries are part of the Visa Waiver Program, which means citizens do not need a visa for U.S. travel.

Check the list of countries in the Visa Waiver Program here:  
<https://www.dhs.gov/visa-waiver-program-requirements>

### Insurance

- Buy emergency travel medical insurance if you do not have it through your workplace benefits

### Financial

- Keep all of your receipts for travel, accommodation, food and other costs. You may be able to claim some of them as medical expenses on your next tax return and get partial refund.



## Important Contacts and Information

### Your health care team

Contact person at your Ontario hospital:

Contact person at your U.S. hospital:

### Health Care

Information about the Ministry of Health's Out of Country program:

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/ohip/outofcountry/prior\\_approval.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/ohip/outofcountry/prior_approval.aspx)

Roswell Park Cancer Institute, Buffalo, New York: <https://www.roswellpark.org/>

Taussig Cancer Institute, Cleveland Clinic, Ohio: <http://my.clevelandclinic.org/services/cancer>

Karmanos Cancer Institute, Detroit, Michigan : <http://www.karmanos.org/home>

### Travel documents

Find out if you need a visa to visit Canada: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/visas.asp>

Information about the U.S. Visa Waiver Program: <https://www.dhs.gov/visa-waiver-program-requirements>

Information about getting an urgent Canadian passport application (not all passport offices process urgent applications): <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/passport/times.asp>

### Financial

Employment Insurance Sickness Benefits:

[http://www.esdc.gc.ca/en/ei/sickness/benefit\\_amount.page](http://www.esdc.gc.ca/en/ei/sickness/benefit_amount.page)