

## Documenting the Family History

### What is the purpose of medical documentation?

Evaluating a family history of cancer and assessing an individual's risk for developing cancer is dependent upon the accuracy of the family history information. Consequently, obtaining documentation of the cancer diagnoses ensures as accurate an evaluation as possible. Sometimes a family member is thought to have had cancer when in fact that individual did not. For example, some women have undergone mastectomy, however the breast tissue had benign, non-cancerous, changes. Likewise, some individuals have had part of the colon removed, but the underlying condition was something other than cancer. Unintentional mistakes such as these can significantly alter the evaluation and result in an inaccurate risk assessment.

### Who should documentation be requested on?

Obtain documentation on all biological family members with a known or suspected cancer diagnosis.

### What type of documentation should be obtained?

- 1) Request a copy of the individual's pathology report. This report is the most helpful as the pathological diagnosis can be very important in evaluating the family history and cancer risk.
- 2) If the pathology report is not available, other medical records relating to the cancer diagnosis.
- 3) If the person is deceased and an autopsy examination was done, requesting the autopsy report.
- 4) If the person is deceased, requesting the death certificate.

### How can medical records or autopsy reports be requested?

We can provide forms for requesting medical records or the individual can write to the doctor and/or hospital to request his/her records. The completed form may be sent directly to the hospital/doctor, or it can be returned to us at the address listed on the form and we will then contact the hospital/doctor for the records.

#### *Completing the request form:*

- The top three lines are for the hospital's and/or doctor's name and address
- Include the full name of the individual. If the individual is female, including her maiden name can be useful
- Request the pathology report and/or cancer records
- Provide as accurate a birthdate as possible
- It is not necessary to know the hospital number or mother's name
- If the individual is living, he/she should sign the form
- If the individual is deceased, the next of kin can sign or if unavailable, a close relative (ie: spouse, child, sibling)

### How can death certificates be requested?

Individuals can request death certificates on their relatives by contacting the state department of health in the state where the individual died. For deaths occurring in Indiana, contact the Indiana State Department of Health-Birth and Death Records at (317) 233-2700. If you know the county in which the individual died, your request may be attended to more quickly by contacting that county's department of health. For deaths occurring outside of Indiana, please feel free to call us, (317) 274-3060, as we have addresses and phone numbers for each state department of health.

#### *Information needed to request death certificate*

- Person's name
- If female, the maiden name can be helpful
- Date of birth, can approximate if necessary
- Date of death, can approximate if necessary
- Your name, relationship to the deceased individual and the reason for your request (may state that you are researching your family history for medical reasons)

**If you have any questions or have difficulty documenting your family history,  
please contact us at (317) 274-3060**