One Way COVID-19 Affected People With Cancer Undergoing Radiotherapy

Patient surveys show that more people with cancer undergoing radiotherapy prefer telemedicine to in-person visits.

November 1, 2021 By National Comprehensive Cancer Network

New research in the October 2021 issue of JNCCN—Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network assessed patient satisfaction and preferences for telemedicine, finding 45% of people with cancer preferred telemedicine, while 34% preferred office visits, and 21% had no preference.

The researchers reviewed survey responses from 1,077 radiation oncology patients across NCCN Member Institution Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK)'s main campus and six regional locations across New York and New Jersey. The questionnaires were based on office and telemedicine visits between December 2019 and June 2020. In terms of patient satisfaction, most reported either no difference or improvement with telemedicine overall (91%) compared to office visits, with similar results for their confidence in their physician (90%), understanding their treatment plans (88%), and confidence their cancer will be treated appropriately (87%).

"These findings provide some evidence that there is a role for telemedicine beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and that it can be a particularly useful tool for certain patients—especially those who may have challenges coming on-site for an appointment," said co-lead author Narek Shaverdian, MD, MSK Department of Radiation Oncology. "Giving patients flexibility and options by being able to see them both in-person and through telemedicine can improve access to care."

Notably, the survey results found that two-thirds of respondents considered telemedicine to be a superior option when it came to treatment-related costs, such as travel and lost wages.

"An individual visit to the physician's office can be costly—including transportation, parking, and time off from other activities," said co-lead author Erin F. Gillespie, MD, MSK Department of Radiation Oncology. "Telemedicine takes away most of this cost and inconvenience, and could therefore reduce the overall burden of engaging with the healthcare system. Also, the ability for family and friends to join the conversation from any location can be game-changing."

The researchers found patient responses varied significantly between video conferencing versus audio. Patients who had telephone-only appointments were more likely to say they thought they would benefit more from an in-person visit.

“Telemedicine can be a resource to increase access to care, but only if patients have and can use these video capabilities,” said Dr. Shaverdian. “There is so much that you learn just by seeing a patient and using visual cues to guide a discussion. A voice-only encounter with a patient you’ve never met before is challenging.”

“Digital tools like telemedicine have the unfortunate potential consequence of paradoxically increasing disparities in access to care,” noted Dr. Gillespie. “But the counter to that is there will be some disadvantaged patients that would not have accessed the system at all, either due to technologic barriers or travel time, and now can connect at least by phone, which is an important and positive change.”

“Telehealth has transformed cancer care throughout the United States, with widespread adoption in an incredibly short timeframe in response to the pandemic,” commented Anne Chiang, MD, PhD, Associate Professor of Medicine, Yale Cancer Center/Smilow Cancer Hospital, a member of the NCCN Policy Advisory Group who was not involved in this research. “This is such an important study as it collects and analyzes data from more than 1,000 radiation oncology patients to compare telehealth and in-person office visits. From the viewpoint of the patient, there were no significant differences across multiple domains of patient satisfaction between types of visits. In fact, some patients preferred telehealth visits and noted that telemedicine could reduce travel costs and time. The bottom line is that this study supports the use of telehealth as a permanent transformation of the healthcare landscape.”

The NCCN EHR Oncology Advisory Group also recently published research in the Journal of Oncology Practice sharing the oncologist perspective on telemedicine. They surveyed 1,038 providers from 26 institutions in the summer of 2020 and found an estimated 46% of post-pandemic visits could be virtual.

Visit JNCCN.org for more on these findings. Complimentary access to “Impact of Telemedicine on Patient Satisfaction and Perceptions of Care Quality in Radiation Oncology” is available until January 10, 2022.

# # #

About JNCCN—Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network

More than 25,000 oncologists and other cancer care professionals across the United States read JNCCN—Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network. This peer-reviewed, indexed medical journal provides the latest information about innovation in translational medicine, and scientific studies related to oncology health services research, including quality care and value, bioethics, comparative and cost effectiveness, public policy, and interventional research on supportive care and survivorship. JNCCN features updates on the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines®), review articles elaborating on guidelines recommendations, health services research, and case reports highlighting molecular insights in patient care. JNCCN is published by Harborside. Visit JNCCN.org. To inquire if you are eligible for a FREE subscription to JNCCN, visit NCCN.org/jnccn/subscribe. Follow JNCCN on Twitter @JNCCN.

About the National Comprehensive Cancer Network

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) is a not-for-profit alliance of leading cancer centers devoted to patient care, research, and education. NCCN is dedicated to improving and facilitating quality, effective, efficient, and accessible cancer care so patients can live better lives. The NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines) provide transparent, evidence-based, expert consensus recommendations for cancer treatment, prevention, and supportive services; they are the recognized standard for clinical direction and policy in cancer management and the most thorough and frequently-updated clinical practice guidelines available in any area of medicine. The NCCN Guidelines for Patients provide expert cancer treatment information to inform and empower patients and caregivers, through support from the NCCN Foundation®. NCCN also advances continuing education, global initiatives, policy, and research collaboration and publication in oncology. Visit NCCN.org for more information and follow NCCN on Facebook @NCCNorg, Instagram @NCCNorg, and Twitter @NCCN.

This announcement was originally published on October 19, 2021, on the National Comprehensive Cancer Network website.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/one-way-covid19-affected-people-cancer-undergoing-radiotherapy