

Long term trends at a comprehensive cancer center during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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March 29, 2023

Abstract

Background: As the ongoing public health crisis from Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic puts strains on current models of cancer care, many health care centers had to adapt to minimize the risk of exposure and infection. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in a comprehensive cancer center were determined. **Purpose:** To measure the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on care delivery at a comprehensive cancer center. **Methods:** The number of on-site and telehealth visits (TH) were obtained from scheduling software. Multiple factors including total visits, telehealth visits, screenings for cancer diagnosis, and cancer treatments were tracked from two years before the pandemic onset through 2022. The length of stay (LOS) and Case Mix Index (CMI) were calculated using hospital database. **Results:** In the third quarter of FY 2020, telehealth visits (TH) represented a fifth of total patient encounters. Cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and surgery, decreased during the pandemic with number of surgeries being most affected (23% decrease in 2020 compared to the previous fiscal year). The average length of stay (LOS) was also longer with less discharges per given time during the pandemic. The increased LOS was related to increased severity of patient illnesses since CMI was higher. Screening mammograms decreased to a nadir of 58% in 2021 as compared to those screened in pre-pandemic fiscal years. **Conclusions :** The COVID-19 pandemic impacted many aspects of care, such as treatment and screenings. Many of these factors had to be postponed due to the fear of acquiring COVID-19 and access to care. The findings presented implicate that the delays and changes in cancer care during the pandemic resulted in less screening and treatment of more advanced disease.

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