

Registered Dietitian Nutritionist Interventions for Weight Maintenance in Oncology Patients Remain Effective During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Objectives: The objective was to investigate if differences in weight outcomes existed for oncology patients seeing Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) between pre-pandemic versus COVID-19 pandemic-era care.

Methods: A retrospective chart review analyzed patients who received nutrition interventions with RDNs over 12 weeks at a midwestern outpatient cancer center. Data were collected from patient care encounters in 2019 (Cohort 1, pre-pandemic) and 2021 (Cohort 2, pandemic). Weight maintenance was defined as within 7.5% of baseline weight, based off malnutrition criteria of weight loss over 3 months. Weight, malnutrition, and nutrition support were analyzed to identify comparability of cohorts. Independent samples t-tests and Chi Square tests were used, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Results: The final analysis included 50 participants in Cohort 1 and 46 in Cohort 2. In total, the majority of patients were White (85%), with a mean age of 62 years. No statistically significant differences were found between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2. While weight loss prior to seeing an RDN was high in both groups, it was not significantly different between groups (Cohort 1: -9.92% vs Cohort 2: -10.69% , $p = 0.560$). In both cohorts, 70% of patients either maintained or gained weight during the 12 weeks ($p = 0.983$). Additionally, Cohorts 1 and 2 maintained similar weight amounts over 12 weeks ($-3.62 \text{ kg} \pm 5.52 \text{ kg}$, versus $-3.12 \text{ kg} \pm 6.65 \text{ kg}$; $p = 0.688$). Similar proportions of patients were malnourished ($p = 0.295$) and used nutrition support ($p = 0.285$).

Conclusions: Outpatient RDN interventions effectively supported oncology patients' weight and nutritional status during both pre-pandemic care and pandemic-era care. Despite considerable weight loss prior to seeing an RDN, further weight loss was attenuated in both groups. High-level nutrition care persisted during the COVID-19 pandemic, while facing many healthcare challenges.

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