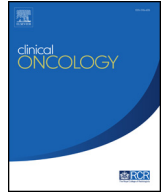




Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.



Letter

Cancer During the Coronavirus Pandemic – As if One Problem Was Not Enough!



Madam — The diagnosis of cancer leads to many psychological problems — denial, self-pity, guilt, change in interpersonal relationships, loss of job, self-image, fear of lifelong morbidity, fear of death, managing logistics of treatment and prolonged follow-up. The suffering of cancer patients has further increased due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic [1,2]. Considering the pervasive and diverse effect the coronavirus pandemic is having on cancer patients [3], we carried out a systematic qualitative analysis of newly diagnosed and under-treatment patients between 1 June 2020 and 6 July 2020. It was a cross-sectional, descriptive and hospital-based study conducted at a tertiary care oncology super specialty hospital in western India. In total, 294 patients were interviewed.

Among our subjects, cancer diagnosis and treatment were delayed in 25.17% and 61.90%, respectively, due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Despite the huge psychological impact cancer has, 15% of our patients were more worried about coronavirus infection and 63.2% of patients thought they would have a better chance of cure if it were not for the coronavirus pandemic. Significant levels (moderate to severe) of anxiety and depression were noticed in 28.91% and 26.50% of patients, respectively, which could be attributed to worsening of instrumental and/or emotional support in nearly 59% during the coronavirus pandemic. Another noteworthy observation was that 35% of the patients were dissatisfied with the distancing between them and the doctors. In a study, half of neuro-oncology patients preferred the face-to-face consultations rather than telephone clinics [4].

Without compromising the outcomes, we may have to regularly treat COVID-19-positive cancer patients as there seems to be no relief from the pandemic in the near future [5]. With coronavirus infection looming all over, the psychological issues of cancer patients have exacerbated. It is important to reassure them that it is safe and essential to

seek medical advice with due precautions. It is imperative to address the mental health of cancer patients to mitigate their anxiety and depression as they fight against two devils — cancer and coronavirus.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

N. Patni*, A. Hota†, A. Patni‡, P. Misra‡

* Department of Radiation Oncology, Bhagwan Mahaveer Cancer Hospital and Research Centre (BMCHRC), Jaipur, India

† Department of Psychology, Bhagwan Mahaveer Cancer Hospital and Research Centre (BMCHRC), Jaipur, India

‡ Department of Radiation Oncology, Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences (RMLIMS), Lucknow, India

References

- [1] Singer S, Das-Munshi J, Brähler E. Prevalence of mental health conditions in cancer patients in acute care – a meta-analysis. *Ann Oncol* 2009;21(5):925–930.
- [2] Gregucci F, Caliendo M, Surgo A, Carbonara R, Bonaparte I, Fiorentino A. Cancer patients in Covid-19 era: swimming against the tide. *Radiother Oncol* 2020.
- [3] Pakpour AH, Griffiths MD. The fear of COVID-19 and its role in preventive behaviors. *J Concurr Disord* 2020;2(1):58–63.
- [4] Ghimire P, Lavrador JP, Onyiriuka L, Robinson C, La J, Mullens L, et al. Patient-reported experience measure for neuro-oncology telephone clinics during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Clin Oncol* 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clon.2020.08.004>.
- [5] Mummudi N, Ghosh-Laskar S, Tibdewal A, Agarwal JP. COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown - implications of the double trouble on radiotherapy practice in India. *Clin Oncol* 2020;32(10):e219.