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Conclusions: Patients operated on during the height of pandemic were less likely to receive immediate reconstruction and regional nerve blocks. Health-care services should develop reliable and useful measures aiming to maintain the highest standards of care in case of new pandemic, and extraordinary events in general.

No conflict of interest.

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The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on quality of life, physical and psychosocial wellbeing in breast cancer patients – a prospective, multicenter cohort study

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Background: The COVID-19 pandemic, and the resulting measures, are impacting daily life and medical management of patients with breast cancer. We evaluated to what extent these changes have affected quality of life, and physical and psychosocial wellbeing of patients (being) treated for breast cancer.

Materials and methods: This study was conducted within the prospective Utrecht cohort for Multiple BREast cancer intervention studies and Long-term evaluation (UMBRELLA). Shortly after the implementation of COVID-19 measures, extra questionnaires were sent to 1595 cohort participants, including standard quality of life (EORTC) questionnaires. Patient-reported outcomes (PROs) were compared to the most recent PROs collected within UMBRELLA before COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 on PROs was assessed using mixed model analysis, adjusting for confounders.

Results: 1051 patients (66%) completed the questionnaires; 31% (n = 327) reported a higher threshold to contact their general practitioner amid the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant deterioration in emotional functioning was observed (82.6 to 77.9, $p < 0.001$), and 505 (48%, 95% CI 45–51) patients reported moderate to severe loneliness. Small improvements were observed in QoL, physical-, social- and role functioning scores. In the subgroup of 51 patients under active treatment, social functioning strongly deteriorated (69.8 to 5.0, $p = 0.03$).

Conclusion: Due to COVID-19, patients (being) treated for breast cancer are less likely to contact physicians, and experience a deterioration in emotional functioning. Patients undergoing active treatment report a strong drop in social functioning. One in two patients reports (severe) loneliness. Online interventions supporting mental health and social interaction are needed during times of social distancing and lockdowns.

No conflict of interest.