Black and Hispanic Patients With Cancer Used Telehealth Care Less Often Than White Patients During COVID-19 Pandemic

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**ASCO Perspective**

“Telehealth is an important part of cancer care, especially in the era of COVID-19. It is important for health care providers, patients, and caregivers to think about how we can help increase use of these kinds of services to ensure all patients can access high-quality cancer care,” said Sonali M. Smith, MD, ASCO Expert.

**ALEXANDRIA, Va.**—During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, fewer Black and Hispanic patients with cancer used telehealth (including phone encounters and video visits) as compared with white patients according to findings from an analysis of data from New York City hospitals. Significant disparities in the use of telehealth not only limit access to quality cancer care for these patients during the pandemic but will continue to hinder patient care as telehealth use becomes more integrated into standard cancer care. The study will be presented as part of the virtual 2020 American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Quality Care Symposium.

**Study at a Glance**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Disparities in use of telehealth during COVID-19 pandemic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>7,681 patients with cancer who had a telehealth (phone or video) visit during March 1, 2020 to June 1, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Significant differences among races were observed in the use of telehealth in 2020 as compared with the health system's patient demographics in 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>Identifies where gaps in cancer care related to the COVID pandemic exist for racial minorities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“In a world where telehealth is needed because patients don’t have in-person access to routine and follow-up cancer care — such as during the COVID-19 pandemic — it is important to recognize the gaps that exist among racial and ethnic minorities,” said lead study author Cardinale B. Smith, MD, PhD, associate professor of medicine and the chief quality officer for cancer services at Mount Sinai Health System. “We know that many patients have not been seeking medical attention or continuing routine care because of fear about the virus.”

**About the Study**

The researchers evaluated data on race/ethnicity and visit type collected from electronic medical records of patients with cancer from the Mount Sinai Health System, which includes a National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center and eight ambulatory sites across New York City. Researchers looked at the use of telehealth between March 1 and June 1, 2020.

**Key Findings**

A total of 7,681 patients had a telehealth visit during the 2020 study period. Of these patients, 48% were white, 19% Black, 6% Hispanic, and 7% Asian. In comparison, of all patients seen at the health system in 2019, 42% were white, 23% Black, 14% Hispanic, and 7% Asian. In 2019
less than 1% of all patients used telehealth. This study is limited to one health system and additional research is needed to determine whether these results are generalizable beyond the population studied.

**Next steps**

The authors are currently exploring ways to improve patient access to telehealth and obtained a grant that will allow them to provide in-home remote monitoring of patients. Patients enrolled in the study are provided with a Wi-Fi booster or enabler, depending on their home situation, and a tablet so they can have video visits with their clinician and participate in patient reported outcome measures.

**Funding**

No external funding was received.

[View the abstract](#).

**For your readers:**

- COVID-19 Resources for People With Cancer
- Health Disparities and Cancer
- The Impact of COVID-19 on Black and Hispanic People with Cancer: Research from the 2020 Quality Care Symposium

[View the disclosures for the 2020 ASCO Quality Care Symposium News Planning Team](https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.oncologymeetings.org/prod/s3fs-public/2020-08/QCS20-committeedisclosures%20%26%20newsplanning.pdf?null)

Disclosures for the study authors can be found in the abstract.
Watch the 5-minute press briefing presentation

About ASCO:

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