Black Patients With Cancer May Be at Increased Risk for COVID-19 Hospitalization

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**ASCO Perspective**

“Generally, people in racial and ethnic minority groups have been shown to have a higher incidence of COVID-19 and worse outcomes. This study shows a similar trend in Black patients with cancer who have COVID-19. It's important for health care providers, caregivers, and Black patients to be aware of the potential increased risk of hospitalization due to the virus,” said Sonali M. Smith, MD, ASCO Expert.

*This summary includes updated data not in the abstract.*

**ALEXANDRIA, Va.**—A study of more than 500 patients with cancer and COVID-19 at a large cancer center in Boston found that Black patients with cancer and COVID-19 were twice as likely to be hospitalized due to complications related to the virus as compared with white patients. Black patients were at greater risk of a visit to the emergency room. The findings will be presented at the upcoming virtual 2020 American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Quality Care Symposium.
“In light of these findings, Black patients with cancer should exercise more caution and consistently use strategies to prevent COVID-19 infection,” said Chintan Pandya, MD, PhD, who led the study while working at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and is now an assistant scientist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. “When a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, it should be offered to high-risk patients first. For now, though, preventive measures are the most effective tool.”

**Study at a Glance**

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<th>Focus</th>
<th>The effect of race on hospitalization in patients with cancer who tested positive for COVID-19</th>
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<td>Population</td>
<td>557 patients with cancer who tested positive for COVID-19 and had at least one visit at a single cancer institute in the past year</td>
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<td>Findings</td>
<td>Black race was independently associated with higher odds of hospitalization due to COVID-19 as compared with white race, after adjusting for confounding factors</td>
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<td>Significance</td>
<td>Highlights importance of racial differences related to COVID-19 in patients with cancer</td>
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**Key Findings**

In this retrospective observational quality of care study, researchers examined electronic medical records for 557 patients with cancer who tested positive for COVID-19 between March 1 and June 10, 2020, and had at least one visit in the past year at a single cancer center.

While 14% (79) of the patients included in the analysis were Black, these patients accounted for 19% (18) of hospitalizations and 27% (15) of emergency room visits due to COVID-19. After controlling for demographics, comorbidities, and cancer variables, Black race was independently associated with a more than two-fold higher risk of hospitalization when compared with white race.
The results are consistent with previous reports that U.S. minority populations experience greater illness severity and health consequences from COVID-19. However, similar data for patients with a cancer diagnosis is limited.

**About the Study**

Demographics, non-cancer comorbidities, cancer type, and treatment were captured from electronic health records. Hospitalization and emergency room visits were assessed from the time of laboratory confirmation of a COVID-19 diagnosis up to 30 days later.

This was a single institution study and additional research is needed to determine whether these results are generalizable beyond the population studied.

**Next Steps**

The researchers plan to compare patients with cancer who tested negative for COVID-19 with those who tested positive to further explore differences related to race.

**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: [link]

Disclosures for the study authors can be found in the abstract.

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Watch the 5-minute press briefing presentation

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Through research, education, and promotion of the highest quality and equitable patient care, ASCO works to conquer cancer and create a world where cancer is prevented or cured, and every survivor is healthy. Conquer Cancer, the ASCO Foundation, supports the Society by funding groundbreaking research and education across cancer's full continuum. Learn more at www.ASCO.org, explore patient education resources at www.Cancer.Net, and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube.