Colon Cancer Treatment Guidelines Updated for COVID-19 Pandemic

Patients will benefit from shorter yet effective radiotherapy treatment and can postpone surgery until after the pandemic subsides.

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For anyone with cancer, the coronavirus pandemic poses daunting new challenges, including whether treatment can be safely postponed. Because of weakened immune systems, people with cancer face a higher risk of suffering severe complications from COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus. But postponing treatment may mean the cancer progresses.

New guidelines may enable people with colorectal cancer to minimize hospital visits (and thus COVID-19 infection risk) while achieving optimal cancer control. A panel of 15 leading cancer experts from across Europe have recommended undergoing a one-week course of radiotherapy and delaying surgery as the best way to treat these patients at this time, according to new guidelines published in the journal Radiotherapy and Oncology, reports the University of Leeds.

This new course of treatment will involve higher-intensity radiation without chemotherapy rather than five weeks of radiotherapy combined with chemotherapy. And instead of surgery taking place one to two weeks after radiotherapy, experts say it can be safely delayed by up to 12 weeks.

Experts conducted intensive research before coming to their conclusion. According to David Sebag-Montefiore, a professor of clinical oncology at the University of Leeds and an honorary clinical oncologist with the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, who led the panel, the recommendations were published just 20 days after the experts' meeting. The new guidelines provide detailed additional recommendations based on the stage of the colorectal cancer.

"Our guidelines will result in a very substantial change in treatment across the globe," Montefiore said. "During the COVID-19 pandemic, our patients will benefit from the use of an effective, shorter and safer radiotherapy treatment."

For related coverage, read "COVID-19 Recommendations for Patients Receiving Anti-Cancer Immunotherapy" and "How to Manage Cancer Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic." Click here to read more coronavirus news.

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