Leading Experts Launch COVID-19 & Cancer Consortium

The collaborative effort aims to learn more about the impact of the new coronavirus on people with cancer.

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How many people with cancer have contracted the new coronavirus?

Are cancer patients more likely to develop severe COVID-19?

How does cancer treatment affect COVID-19 outcomes?

These are among the many unanswered questions researchers are asking about the new coronavirus (officially known as SARS-CoV-2) and its impact on people living with cancer.

In an effort to learn more, a group of leading experts have launched the new COVID-19 & Cancer Consortium to collect information about the natural history of the new disease in this population.

As described by Charles Blanke, MD, of the SWOG Cancer Research Network, the concept emerged in mid-March from clinicians on Twitter who sought to share information about COVID-19 among people with cancer. The consortium now has its own Twitter account, @COVID19nCCC.

Although much remains to be learned about the new disease, reports to date indicate that people with compromised immune systems—a group that includes cancer patients receiving chemotherapy—are at greater risk of developing severe COVID-19. What's more, many people living with cancer are over age 60 or have underlying health conditions that increase their risk.

"Information is power, and we anticipate a very rapid accrual," Gary Lyman, MD, MPH, of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center told ASCO Daily News. "We need careful clinical evaluation of promising, but potentially toxic, therapies and cannot base treatment on a limited number of anecdotal reports. Hopefully, this registry can help inform these trials and put forward hypotheses for further clinical trial validation."

The COVID-19 & Cancer Consortium is spearheaded by a steering committee comprised of experts from institutions including Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Aurora Health Care, the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance and Fred Hutch, Harvard Medical School and the Dana-Farber Cancer

Institute, the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, Lausanne University Hospital and the University of Miami's Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center (represented by Cancer Health advisory board member Gilberto Lopes, MD).

In addition, the consortium includes more than three dozen National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Centers and more than 100 collaborating oncologists, researchers and others who provide care for people with cancer. Currently, healthcare providers from the United States, Europe, Argentina, Canada and the United Kingdom are eligible to participate, but the consortium is working to expand to more countries.

The more clinicians who provide information about their patients with cancer and COVID-19, the more valuable the registry will be. Providers can enter case reports via the consortium's website (ccc19.org). The survey—which should take less than five minutes—asks about patient demographics and medical history, details about their cancer and its treatment, and the course of COVID-19 disease progression and outcomes. All patient information is anonymous.

Participants are urged to identity and report all cases of COVID-19 in people with a current or past history of invasive malignancies, not just those who are critically ill. This includes people with few or no symptoms.

"We hope to learn a significant amount about cancer patients infected with COVID-19 in a short period of time," steering committee member Jeremy Warner, MD, an associate professor of medicine and biomedical informatics at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, wrote in a blog post for the American Association for Cancer Research.

"Given that certain findings may have practice-changing implications, we plan to disseminate critical findings immediately through the website, social media and pre-prints," he continued. "We also anticipate using the survey tool to collect long-term outcomes on patients who have recovered from the acute COVID-19 illness, as the effects in the weeks and months after diagnosis remain to be ascertained."

Click here for the COVID-19 & Cancer Consortium website

Go to cancerhealth.com/tag/coronavirus for our continuing coverage of COVID-19.

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