

COVID-19's Impact on Radiation Oncology

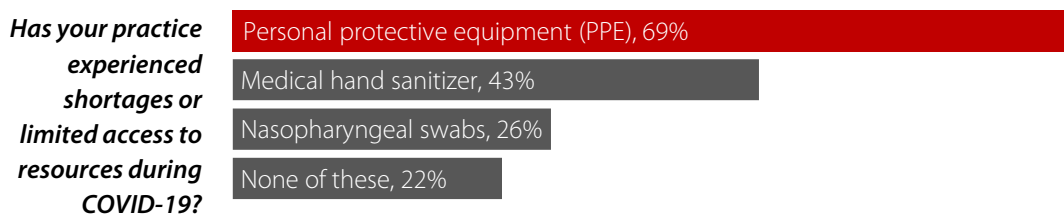
Initial Results of a Nationwide Physician Survey, 5/20/20

As the COVID-19 pandemic creates lasting change in health care delivery, the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) is surveying radiation oncologists across the United States to understand the impact of the novel coronavirus on their clinics. **Initial findings show that practices, despite facing challenges such as PPE shortages and financial declines, made safety and process adaptations that allow them to continue to provide high quality care to cancer patients.**

This report includes the initial results from a survey to track radiation oncology's response to the pandemic. Findings are from 222 physician leaders of radiation oncology practices (43% response rate) collected April 16-30, 2020. Future reports will examine changes over time. For more information about ASTRO's response to COVID-19 and resources for providers and patients, visit astro.org/covid19.

Key Survey Findings

Most radiation oncology clinics experienced shortages of key supplies, especially personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical hand sanitizer.



Radiation oncology clinics adapted their safety protocols so they could continue to care for patients and protect their staff. Clinics quickly implemented new screening, social distancing and other protective safety measures, such as requiring masks. Most practices (89%) also began to offer telemedicine options for patients, most commonly for routine follow-up and consultation visits.



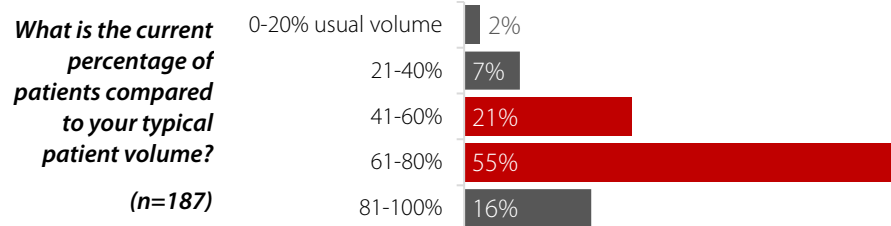
89% now offer telemedicine for patient consultations

Many clinics have been able to treat patients without compromise following rapid implementation of protective safety measures. Where appropriate and needed, however, radiation oncology teams adapted care plans to provide shorter treatment courses to reduce the number of visits to a health care facility. Physicians also delayed radiation therapy for some cancers, particularly early-stage, non-invasive prostate and breast cancers that can safely be managed temporarily with hormone therapy.

Protective Measures at Radiation Oncology Clinics in Response to COVID-19	
Staff routinely wear masks	99%
Social distancing measures	98%
Screen patients at the door	98%
Increased clinic sterilization/cleaning	95%
Staff showing symptoms are tested	93%
Screen staff before each shift	91%
Visitors are not allowed	90%
Patients routinely wear masks	83%

Additional Survey Findings

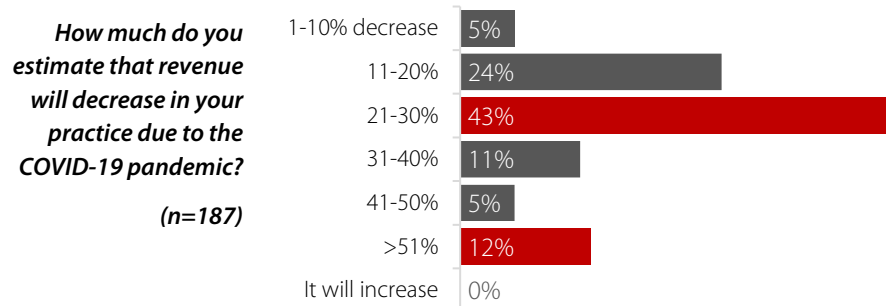
- While 100% of the responding radiation oncology clinics indicated that they continue to provide services, patient volume decreased substantially following the COVID-19 outbreak. Declines were reported by 85% of respondents. On average, practices saw two-thirds of their typical patient volume.



These decreases were due mostly to treatment delays/deferrals for certain diseases, as well as fewer patients being referred for radiation therapy (82% and 81%, respectively, of those reporting declines).

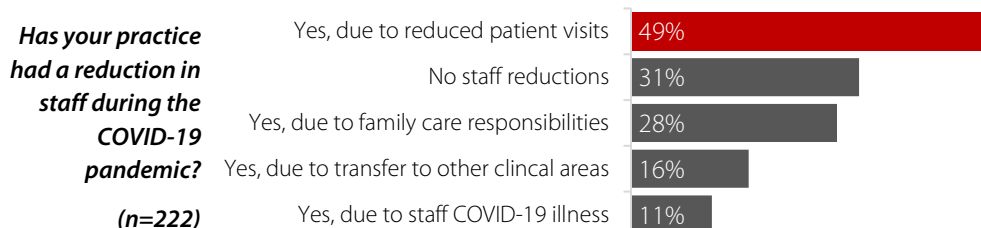
Many clinics deferred some new patient visits, such as for benign disease. Deferrals were more likely at practices located in metropolitan areas (79%) than at those in non-metro/rural areas (49%). The remainder reported no change in scheduling new patient visits.

- With the steep reduction in in-office visits, a correspondingly severe decline in practice revenue is also expected.



Freestanding radiation oncology clinics are expected to face disproportionately higher financial difficulty from the pandemic. One in five respondents at freestanding clinics (20%) predicted their practice would lose more than half of its revenue, compared to one in 10 respondents at hospital-based clinics (9%).

- Many practices experienced staff reductions due to declines in patient volume, family care responsibilities and other factors. Very few clinics reduced staff due to COVID-19 illness among staff members.



ASTRO's Response to COVID-19

In response to the outbreak, a workgroup convened by ASTRO leadership issued clinical guidance to help radiation oncology teams continue providing safe, high quality cancer care while also minimizing the risks of COVID-19 exposure for patients and clinical staff.

The resources created for medical professionals include [FAQs](#) that address common questions seen online and heard in the clinic and a [summary](#) of the recommendations for practices. ASTRO also collaborated with the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) to publish specific recommendations for [lung cancer radiotherapy](#) and [head and neck cancer radiotherapy](#) during the pandemic.

Radiation oncologists shared their experiences and advice for patients and fellow providers via [case reports and original research](#) in ASTRO's peer-reviewed journals, [blog posts](#) with firsthand accounts of providers in the field, and webcasts including an update on radiation oncology care with the [National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship](#) and a discussion of cancer patient safety with the [Infectious Disease Society of America](#).

ASTRO continues to advocate for patients and practices on Capitol Hill. Key issues include securing PPE for medical providers, health insurance coverage for patients and direct financial aid for practices losing revenue due to declines in patient visits. Visit ASTRO's [COVID-19 Advocacy hub](#) for details.

For more information and resources for providers and patients, visit astro.org/covid19.

Survey Methodology

An online survey was completed by 222 U.S. based, practicing radiation oncologists identified as practice leaders in ASTRO's member database (42.8% response rate). Responses were collected April 16-30, 2020.

Respondent demographics:

- *Practice Type*: 62% private practice/community-based, 35% academic/university-based
- *Practice Location*: 69% hospital, 29% free-standing/satellite clinic
- *U.S. Region*: 20% West, 25% Midwest, 33% South, 21% Northeast (based on [U.S. Census](#) categories)
- *Community Type*: 88% metro, 12% nonmetro (based on [USDA](#) Rural-Urban Continuum Codes)

About ASTRO

The American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) is the world's largest radiation oncology society, with more than 10,000 members who are physicians, nurses, biologists, physicists, radiation therapists, dosimetrists and other health care professionals who specialize in treating patients with radiation therapies. To learn more about ASTRO, visit our [website](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).