



Gastrointestinal oncology in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic

Ghassan K. Abou-Alfa^{1,2}

¹Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York, NY, USA; ²Weill Medical College at Cornell University, New York, NY, USA

Correspondence to: Ghassan K. Abou-Alfa, MD. Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York, NY 10065, USA. Email: abou-alfg@mskcc.org.

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The COVID-19 pandemic which we are currently witnessing, and will hopefully live through, will undoubtedly impact how we practice medicine and provide oncologic care. It remains to be seen how the pandemic will impact the global cancer burden and more specifically gastrointestinal cancers, in particular, the worldwide common gastric, liver hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), and colon cancers.

Liver function test abnormalities have been attributed to COVID-19 although clinically significant liver injury appears to be uncommon (1) and maybe inconsequential (2).

Within the gastrointestinal oncology world the potential side effects of chemotherapeutic, targeted therapy, and immunotherapy agents remain to be seen in the setting of COVID-19. To date, there is limited published data to rely upon, although there is one report of a patient with HCC and liver transplantation who recovered (3).

Nonetheless data is sparse and we need to remember that we are at the beginning of understanding how to treat COVID 19 and understanding the impacts on the gastrointestinal tract and related cancers (4).

As the medical community works toward understanding COVID-19 and its impact on human health the opportunities for learning are substantial, and will be tackled over generations to come. The social distancing has enhanced our virtual connectivity with patients and embrace new practices for delivery of medical care. We acknowledge the gains but also the limitations of virtual medical care. Does every symptom need to be assessed in clinic? Can we introduce virtual care as standard practice? Can we provide the most prescribed treatment of reassurance virtually? These virtual practices transcend many physical boundaries and we are witnessing a very rapid period of change in the delivery of medical care. More to come in the “AC” (After-COVID-19) era!

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