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Research Letter | Oncology

Changes in the Number of US Patients With Newly Identified Cancer Before and During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic

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Introduction

In response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the American Society of Clinical Oncology recommends, “to conserve health system resources and reduce patient contact with health care facilities, ... that cancer screening procedures that require clinic/center visits, such as screening mammograms and colonoscopy, be postponed for the time being.”¹ A Washington Post headline reported, “Patients with heart attacks, strokes, and even appendicitis vanish from hospitals.”² A study from 9 high-volume US cardiac catheterization laboratories³ found a 38% decrease in patients treated for ST-elevation myocardial infarction, considered a life-threatening condition. In this study, we analyzed weekly changes in the number of patients with newly identified cancer before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Author affiliations and article information are listed at the end of this article.

Methods

This cross-sectional study included patients across the United States who received testing for any cause by Quest Diagnostics and whose ordering physicians assigned them international statistical classification of diseases and related health problems, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes associated with any of 6 cancer types (ie, breast, colorectal, lung, pancreatic, gastric, and esophageal) from January 1, 2019, to April 18, 2020. Each patient was counted once, at the first instance of each ICD-10 code

Figure. Newly Identified Cancers, Baseline Mean and Weekly During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic

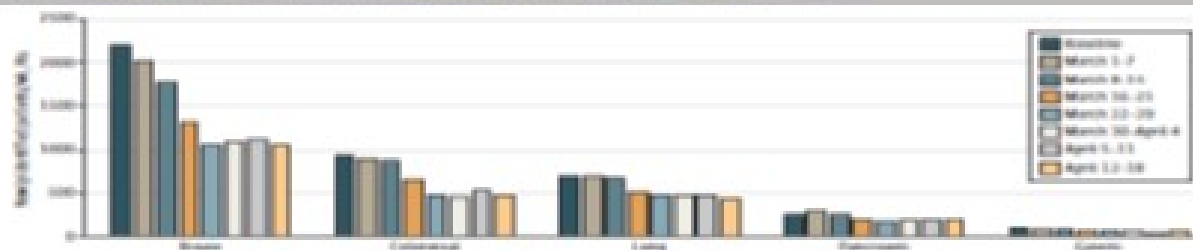


Table. Demographic Information for Patients With Newly Identified Cancer

Cancer type	January 6, 2019, to February 26, 2020			March 1 to April 18, 2020		
	Patients, No.	Women, No. (%)	Age, mean (SD), y	Patients, No.	Women, No. (%)	Age, mean (SD), y
Breast	132 513	132 513 (100)	64.3 (12.7)	6475	6475 (100)	63.9 (13.0)
Colorectal	56 744	28 056 (49.4)	66.7 (13.4)	4377	23 079 (48.2)	65.4 (13.3)
Lung	41 471	27 332 (65.7)	70.1 (10.4)	3753	1 969 (52.3)	68.3 (11.9)
Pancreatic	14 248	8063 (56.6)	67.6 (12.7)	1547	829 (53.6)	66.8 (12.8)
Gastric	1744	1414 (81.1)	67.4 (13.3)	471	140 (29.7)	66.7 (13.8)
Esophageal	6648	1 054 (15.8)	66.4 (13.4)	667	142 (21.4)	66.4 (13.4)

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Cancer Diagnosis Declines March-April: Implications

