Study Finds That COVID-19 Created Significant Disruptions in Breast, Colorectal and Cervical Cancer Screenings Among Federally Qualified Health Centers

All health systems in this study participated in “Back on track with screening” quality improvement projects

A new study finds that the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to significant disruptions in breast, colorectal and cervical cancer screenings among federally qualified health systems (FQHS) spanning 15 states across the United States. The postponed screenings have created backlogs that systems will need to address as health facilities re-open for preventive care, according to the study. The study was published in the *Journal of Preventive Medicine*. Data were collected August-September 2020.

Of the 22 systems in the study, 11 (50%) reported stopping cancer screening completely for the cancer type specified in their application since the start of COVID-19 disruptions. One center reported never stopping screening entirely for their specified cancer types. Over half of all systems reported enforced screening service disruptions/cancellations as a result of state or local COVID-19 restrictions.

The *Cancer Screening during COVID-19* projects aim to help FQHCs resume cancer prevention services and catch up on missed cancer screenings to mitigate the impact of disruptions in care related to COVID-19 on cancer morbidity and mortality.

The study shows that when clinics were asked about service disruption, there was not one unified picture, and different clinics even within the same state described different times when experiencing peaks in disruption of screening. Half of the systems were able to maintain home-based stool sampling testing for colorectal cancer without any disruptions. The study also found that 100% of the clinics switched to telehealth visits, and 100% implemented structural changes in the office, including waiting room protocols.

In Fall 2020, the American Cancer Society and the National Football League (NFL) joined forces on *Cancer Screening during COVID-19*, aimed at reducing cancer mortality disparities. Funding was provided by the National Football League (NFL) in partnership with the American Cancer Society.

“Without purposeful intervention, pandemic-related disruptions in preventive services may widen existing cancer disparities,” the authors write. “That is why partnerships like our COVID recovery screening project are critical, and ACS is honored to work with FQHCs to get back on track with screening.

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