

Press release



For immediate release

COVID-19: The Quebec Cancer Coalition unveils the results of its consultations:

THE MAJORITY OF ONCOLOGY PATIENTS FEEL ABANDONED BY THE SYSTEM

Montreal, April 16, 2020 – In the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, the Quebec Cancer Coalition surveyed oncology patients to understand the impact of the pandemic measures on them. The results of the consultations conducted with 592 Quebec patients with various types of cancer and spread across almost all regions in the province, show that nearly 61% of them are currently affected in the continuity of their care.

Oncology Patients Are Concerned About the Impact of the Crisis

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the Coalition has received numerous communications from patients concerned about the current situation. It should be noted that in oncology, any unexplained change and existing wait times are already causing anxiety for patients and their families. The current environment brings significant additional concerns. Indeed, the results illustrate that a large majority of respondents currently feel abandoned by the system and feel that have very little information about what will happen next in their care, and why. In addition, most oncology patients are in a very fragile state of health, which is also a source of concern since many of them are worried about contracting the virus and the consequences this could have.

The main findings of the survey conducted by the Coalition included :

- 60.8% of respondents felt that their care was affected by the effects of the health crisis due to COVID-19.
- 66.7%, or nearly two thirds of respondents, are experiencing increased anxiety or worsening of existing psychological health problems as a result of the situation accompanying the pandemic. The main causes of this anxiety are :
 - Difficulty - or even impossibility - in accessing treatment;
 - The risk of jeopardizing their vital prognosis;
 - The fear of contracting COVID-19;
 - Increased isolation preventing them from getting support from their loved ones.
- 68.7% of the 592 respondents felt affected by the postponement or cancellation of an appointment. The most common cases were:

- Follow-ups (35.5%);
 - Imaging tests (14.7%);
 - Surgeries (8.3%).
- Only 2.5% of the 592 respondents were tested for COVID-19.

Recommendations to better support cancer patients

In light of the results of the consultations, the Coalition urges the Quebec government to take action to better support cancer patients in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. A series of recommendations have been drawn up to improve management and communication with patients. Among other things, the Coalition recommends reorganizing certain services so that follow-ups can be maintained; planning a "post-COVID" recovery plan to monitor wait times for all procedures; improving communications between health professionals and their patients in order to reassure them; and setting up a special line for oncology patients.

Quotes

"The results of our consultations have been clear: the majority of oncology patients feel left to fend for themselves and experience an increased feeling of anxiety in relation to the impact on their care and prognosis, but also concerning the fear of contracting the virus. Despite the pandemic context and the understandable constraints we now face, we must not abandon these already vulnerable people."

- Eva Villalba, Executive Director, Quebec Cancer Coalition

"I am aware that the health-care personnel is doing everything it can according to the guidelines. However, I'm starting to feel the rug slip out from under me. Naturally, I understand the magnitude of the pandemic. Who wouldn't? However, because of my incurable and metastatic cancer, I now have two fears: that I will die from the virus because my immune system is weakened, and that I will die because the palliative care that keeps me alive will be cut back because of all the network's efforts to fight the virus."

- Marie-Andrée Côté, metastatic cancer patient

"To avoid a tsunami of cases to be treated in a few weeks for cancer patients, it is important to implement measures now to allow surgeries to be resumed in 'cold zone' facilities, to facilitate chemotherapy at home or in infusion clinics, and to provide access to radiation therapy."

- Marie-Pascale Pomey, Professor at the School of Public Health of the Université de Montréal

For more information for cancer patients during the COVID-19 pandemic:

<http://coalitioncancer.com/en/covid-19/>

About the Quebec Cancer Coalition

The Quebec Cancer Coalition was founded in 2001 to give a strong voice to people affected by cancer, and is a group of more than 60 nonprofit organizations representing all types and phases of cancer, from all regions of Quebec, wishing to improve the health care system for the benefit of people affected by cancer. It defends the rights and interests of patients and caregivers. For nearly 20 years, its members have shared the vision of a healthier Quebec and a system focused on patients, survivors and caregivers.



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-30-

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