

COVID-19 – The Quebec Cancer Coalition announces results of second round of consultations:

QUEBEC GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO BE MORE PROACTIVE TO ENSURE PROPER PROTECTION FOR CANCER PATIENTS

Montreal, June 30, 2020 – With the health care system mobilized to address the COVID-19 pandemic, the Quebec Cancer Coalition has conducted a second survey of cancer patients to get a sense of how they are being affected. The results offer important lessons on how cancer treatment resources need to be managed during this health crisis and point to ways to avoid a new slowdown or stop in treatments and operations should a second COVID-19 wave hit.

Cancer care availability still compromised

This second survey by the Coalition allows it to draw certain conclusions on patient perceptions and possible solutions. The data show that despite certain positive signs, health system management of the pandemic is disrupting the daily lives of patients and keeping them in a state of vulnerability.

A few highlights:

- One respondent in two feels that the pandemic-related slowdown has affected the continuity of their cancer care.
- 65% are still feeling heightened anxiety or experiencing greater mental health problems on account of the pandemic.
- The main needs of those affected are access to their specialist (34%), access to their personal support network (31%), and comforting (21%).
- 72% of respondents said they were satisfied with teleconsultation services, with the vast majority saying they preferred teleconsultation services to no follow-up or consultations of any kind. Most however preferred videoconferencing to telephone calls.
- Asked how open they were to traveling to obtain faster access to care, surgery, or clinical testing, 56% said they would be willing to travel a certain distance to have surgery or receive an otherwise unavailable treatment if it was timely, not too far away, and guaranteed highly safe. This alternative could prove beneficial to both patients and hospitals.
- 73% of the recommendations from the first survey in April have been partially or completely implemented, which shows the government is listening.

The Coalition is asking the government to be more proactive

The Coalition, their members and patient groups that took part in this second consultation are eager to do their part in making sure that the healthcare system can respond quickly, and that oncology

care and operations are available without interruption. To date the government has been attentive and responsive, but there are lessons to be learned and concrete actions that need to be taken quickly, and the government must double down on efforts to address them. The Coalition has therefore formulated a series of recommendations to ensure that the issues encountered over the last three months do not arise again.

The Coalition makes the following recommendations:

- Plan to make greater use of non-hospital resources, such as CLSCs and home care services, to take cancer care and follow-up out of hospitals whenever possible.
- Offer patients the option of traveling to other regions to receive faster care or surgery, without compromise to patient or care team safety, while continuing to have their original physicians follow them.
- Provide free access to flu and pneumonia vaccines to all Quebec residents to reduce the hospitalization rate for these illnesses, whose symptoms are similar to those of COVID-19. Also involve community pharmacies in the public vaccination campaign by planning service delivery as of now and ensuring that pharmacies have enough PPE and clear instructions on hygiene measures and distancing, so they can administer the vaccines efficiently and safely.

Quotes

“We appreciate that the healthcare system had to respond to a health crisis and that cancer care had to be reduced temporarily. But now the government must proactively seek to avoid a second slowdown, which could have serious consequences for many patients and their families, and long-term impacts on the healthcare system itself.”

- Eva Villalba, Executive Director, Quebec Cancer Coalition

“It’s important to understand that separating patients and family caregivers is a source of extreme anxiety for all concerned. Family caregivers make a huge contribution to patient outcomes, and it’s high time they were included in the long-term solution. The psychological support and home care they provide must be a central part of the patient care plan. It’s important we encourage families to consider this avenue and that we provide training in this regard.”

- Kelvin Arroyo, cancer patient family caregiver

“There are solutions to avoid wait times. All that’s needed is to make the effort and implement measures that ensure that services to cancer patients are quickly reinstated and safely maintained, in consultation with those living with cancer. Surgery and care delays can have a huge negative impact on the healing process and on the patient’s mental and physical health. It’s something we absolutely must take into consideration”

- Dr. Marie-Pascale Pomey, Professor, Department of Health Management, Assessment, and Policy, ESPUM and Researcher at the CHUM Research Center

To consult the complete report: https://coalitioncancer.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FINAL_REPORT_COVID-CANCER-JUNE2020.pdf

To learn more about cancer patients and COVID-19: <http://coalitioncancer.com/covid-19/>

About the Quebec Cancer Coalition

The Quebec Cancer Coalition was created in 2001 to be a leading advocate for those who are affected by cancer. Bringing together more than 60 non-profits from all regions and representing all types and phases of cancer, it seeks to improve the cancer healthcare system in Quebec. Defending the rights and interests of patients and caregivers is one of its missions. For nearly 20 years, its members have shared a vision for a healthier Quebec and a healthcare system centered on patients, survivors, and caregivers.



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