

FCS is participating in a national awareness campaign to encourage cancer screenings.

COVID-19

COVID-19: A Dangerous Delay

New study reveals COVID-19's negative impact on cancer screenings, diagnosis and treatment

A new national study that details the devastating effect the COVID-19 crisis has had on cancer screenings, diagnosis and treatment is garnering headlines across the nation. Lucio Gordan, MD, President and Managing Physician of Florida Cancer Specialists & Research Institute (FCS), and FCS Assistant Managing Physician Michael Diaz, MD are co-authors of the study, which was conducted for the Community Oncology Alliance (COA) by Avalere Health and published in the November issue of the journal JCO Clinical Cancer Informatics. Its findings show a substantial decrease in the number of cancer screenings, diagnosis and treatment for senior adults and Medicare beneficiaries in 2020.

FCS Clinics Already Seeing A Dangerous Trend

Dr. Gordan, Dr. Diaz and colleagues were part of the study's research team of oncologists who reported that they are already seeing patients being diagnosed with later stage cancers, which require more complex treatment and often result in higher morbidity and mortality rates. "In the early months of the pandemic," Dr. Gordan explained, "many people chose or had to delay or even skip regular screenings,

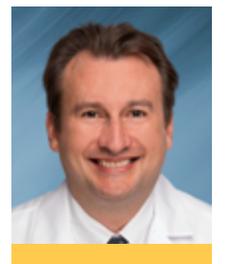
such as mammograms, prostate exams, PSA testing or colonoscopies, among others, for various types of cancer. This has resulted in later diagnoses for some patients and delays in beginning treatment. Oncologists are preparing their practices for significant impact in cancer patient outcomes due to these delays."

Dr. Diaz, who also serves as President of COA, concurs. "If cancers are not diagnosed at an early stage, we could face rising death rates for several years to come," he said. "It is critical that adults with a family history of cancer and others who may be experiencing symptoms do not delay their screenings for the fear of being exposed to or contracting coronavirus. Medical practices now have numerous strategies in place to protect the safety and health of patients, doctors, nurses and other staff members."

The COA study revealed a drastic drop in screening procedures, surgeries and treatments for patients with colon, prostate, lung and breast cancer in a group comprised of greater than six million



Dr. Michael Diaz



Dr. Lucio Gordan

seniors (Medicare population); if this trend continues, physicians warn, it will lead to a public health catastrophe, as the number of undiagnosed/untreated cancer patients rise and cancer mortality increases.

Community Oncology's Quick Response

One positive cited in the study was the rapid adoption of telehealth and other strategies by community oncology practices, such as Florida Cancer Specialists. Dr. Gordan said, "Community oncologists and their team members showed incredible resilience and resolve to deal with this severe crisis, by adopting telehealth very quickly, reorganizing workflows, enhancing safety processes at their clinics and migrating staff to work from home, among other strategies. Although a decrease in services was inevitable, the resolve of these practitioners and staff handled and avoided what could have been a much worse situation."

FCS Working with COA to Develop National Awareness Campaign

FCS, along with other organizations, is leading a nationwide effort to obtain sponsorship that will support a crucial initiative from COA to create a national awareness campaign calling attention to the importance of getting recommended cancer screenings or treatment and not delaying because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Plans include producing a national public service announcement that will drive awareness. The campaign will communicate and reinforce these important messages:

- Do not delay getting screened for cancer, whether it is a routine or annual screening, or if you think something is "wrong."
- Early cancer detection and treatment saves lives.
- Screening is safe and conducted in facilities that are COVID-19 free and making patient safety the top priority.

Cancer Is Not Quarantined — We Must Take Action to Save Lives

In the early months of the pandemic, shelter-in-place orders and a general uncertainty about the virus caused an enormous decline in the number of



screenings. While screening numbers have risen in the past few months, they still have not reached pre-pandemic levels. Many Floridians remain scared and unsure of whether or not to get annual routine screenings, particularly if they are older or in a high-risk category for the coronavirus.

With the current third wave of COVID-19 sweeping across the country, it's no wonder that people are fearful and confused about what to do, even though the majority of Americans recognize the

importance of cancer screenings. Adding to the disarray is the fact that, once again, hospitals (where many screening facilities are located) are facing shortages in both personnel and resources, which could affect screening schedules.

Despite these concerns, however, we must take action. That's why the COA campaign is so important. We are convinced that resuming regular cancer screenings will save lives, not only in cancer care but also, hopefully, in other areas of medicine as well.