

THE APAC TIMES NEWSLETTER



Living with Cancer in times of COVID-19:

What's the New Normal ?

It takes a lot to overshadow the second leading cause of death globally, but a dearth of data, shortage of tests and equipment, lack of any proven treatment or vaccine, and the speed at which the SARS-CoV-2 virus has spread have turned COVID-19 into a much bigger worry like our many other pre-existing concerns such as Cancer; at least for the next 3-4 years as per WHO.

Cancer is the devil we know. This new threat? The data is still limited. The COVID-19 outbreak has posed a unique challenge for oncology experts across the country who are meeting new patients via Zoom or completely covered in protective gear. Both the newly diagnosed and those with metastatic disease worry that going in for lifesaving treatments may just be the end for them. To tackle this, oncologists are switching to less aggressive therapies, postponing surgeries where possible and are opting to individualise (personalise) the treatment approach for each cancer patient.

Italy has recorded a 20% mortality in cancer patients. An analysis of patients in China published in *The Lancet Oncology* in March stated that patients with cancer might have a higher risk of COVID-19 than individuals without cancer. “Patients with cancer had poorer outcomes from COVID-19, providing a timely reminder to physicians that more intensive attention should be paid to patients with cancer, in case of rapid deterioration,” the article’s authors wrote, further

suggesting “intentional postponing of adjuvant chemotherapy or elective surgery for stable cancers in endemic areas”. According to a recent article published in a leading daily, in words of Dr. Shripad Banavali, Medical Oncologist Tata Memorial Hospital (TMH), Mumbai, “Intensive cancer therapies result in decreased blood count, more immunosuppression and often requires blood platelet transfusions. These patients are thus at high risk of catching the infection”, he noted. He also added that they had relied on data from China, which showed a high mortality rate due to COVID-19 in cancer patients on active treatment.

Future of Cancer Regimen in COVID 19 era: What's in store ?

So what options are cancer patients currently left with? Surgeries are done only when last resort, more and more patients are given oral chemotherapies. All health professionals are thus focusing on modifying the treatment protocols rather than discontinuing the ongoing treatments to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 as much as possible.

Among the possible treatment options for cancer patients, the benefit of Dendritic Cell Immunotherapy cannot be ignored! Being completely personalised for each cancer patient, and derived from their own blood and tumor cells; this promising therapy is associated with minimal side effects, if any. **This therapy has been approved for treatment of cancer and is marketed by APAC Biotech (brand name APCEDEN), the pioneers of Dendritic Cell Immunotherapy in the country.** The personalised DCs target the cancer cells, recognise them and specifically attack and mount a robust immune response in the patient. Being specific for the patient's tumor, only the cancer cells are attacked, and healthy dividing cells are not affected. Hence, much lesser adverse effects. **The activated Immune system provides enhanced immunity to the patient thereby also improving the quality of life and their ability to fight cancer.**

In these unprecedented times, one must critically evaluate the options available and discuss treatment best suitable with their oncologist. Patients, doctors and researchers triage, tweak, pivot and try not to panic during the COVID-19 pandemic.



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