

Transcript Details

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ReachMD

www.reachmd.com

info@reachmd.com

(866) 423-7849

An Oncologist's View: Cancer Care & Self Care During Winter

Welcome to *Project Oncology* on ReachMD. I'm Dr. Jacob Sands, and today I'm going to share some tips on how we can help our patients with cancer stay safe and healthy during the winter months.

As we're now entering the first full winter with SARS-CoV-2 in the U.S. I think represents a time that we're all looking at as a likely challenging time. There's a lot in the works, and so there are things to be optimistic about, given the upcoming vaccine and such. But, given the spread of the virus, at a time when flu and other viruses are often present in the winter, this is really a season that we're looking at, and eyes are on. You know, the challenge in all of this has been how to make sure we're getting people treatment in the middle of everything else. On the one hand we really want to avoid gatherings and avoid the public to really prevent spread of SARS-CoV-2. And this is particularly important with the population of people who have lung cancer and other lung diagnoses on top of other comorbidities. But comorbidities related to the lungs seem to be a particularly high-risk group. So one is to avoid all of that, but at the same time, lung cancer is a pandemic as well, and so for somebody with lung cancer, getting appropriate treatment for that is extraordinarily important. And so that's something we need to continue to manage throughout the course of all of this as well.

You know, the biggest threat now in the winter is really just an increasing amount of threat for what's already been going on, so we do have the benefit of experience. Preventing spread of the virus within this population is overwhelmingly important and this is something that we've already talked quite a bit with patients over months in clinic already. As an oncologist in the Boston area, we really experienced one of the earlier surges in the U.S. And so, this is something that our population in the area has already experienced, and we've talked quite a bit about. So at this point, I find that the patients that I'm seeing in clinic are really well-versed now in how to reduce their risk of getting the virus. And the amount of surge that occurs in the area is really going to further impact that. If we have increasing numbers of hospitalizations like we had earlier on, then that again presents a challenge in how best to treat patients, because we'll want to do things for their care that's really gonna minimize the risk of them showing up in the emergency room, or needing further care as well. When the emergency room is full of people with SARS-CoV-2, when the ICU's are full of people intubated with SARS-CoV-2, this really impacts the overall flow of the healthcare system, and in those cases, minimizing the risk of needing the emergency room becomes extraordinarily important. At times like right now, where our healthcare system is still fully going, we haven't put anything else on hold in our institution we do recognize surging numbers in the area, and hopefully, those will level off and flatten the curve, as we would say in the beginning so as not to divert some of our healthcare resources really just focused on treating SARS-CoV-2. At the same time, having our healthcare system fully functioning is really important to continue screening, and to continue having the operating rooms fully going with their schedules to be able to do surgery for early-stage lung cancer, for example, which is curative treatment. And so, the biggest challenge is how to flatten the curve to stop the spread, so that the healthcare system doesn't get overwhelmed – but as the healthcare system gets overwhelmed, the challenge then becomes how to continue to provide all these really important aspects of care, while also addressing the surge going on.

As far as tips for people with lung cancer, to keep them safe during the winter, I think, on the one hand, people understand hand-washing, mask-wearing, social distancing – these are terms everyone is familiar with now. But I think the aspect of this that's important for people to understand is that meeting up with a few people is not necessarily safe in itself. And so, people talk about their bubbles that they're maintaining, and they say, "Oh, well it's just my family that comes over." But their family members who don't have lung cancer maybe meet up with more people, because those family members don't carry the same risk as well. Or, you just have a lot of different people who are meeting up with small numbers, but they all kind of stitch together, to where the whole city essentially can be tracked all together, given the few people who meet with a few people, who meet with a few people, and so on. And so, it's probably more an aspect of tightening up the guidelines themselves, and really understanding more about mask-wearing means all the time. And all the people around you wearing a mask and social distancing is not having overlapping bubbles but really that the people you're

meeting up with – you know that they, themselves, have been bubbled and not with other people outside of your bubble. So, these are all really important to preventing spread within society so it's important for everybody, but particularly our patients with lung cancer, this becomes even more important.

Well that's all the time I have for today, but I hope you found these tips helpful. To access this and other episodes in our series, visit ReachMD.com-slash-Project-Oncology, where you can Be Part of the Knowledge. Thanks for listening!