

## The Impact of Medical Visits on Patients With Cancer

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<b>Origin of Study</b>	USA
<b>Type of Study</b>	QUALITY-OF-LIFE STUDY BASED ON INTERVIEWING PATIENTS AND THEIR CAREGIVERS
<b>Objectives</b>	Determine the impact of clinic visits on quality of life of cancer patients and their caregivers
<b>Study Design</b>	<p>Informal interviews were conducted in which open-ended and exploratory questions were asked about cancer, treatment, and visits to the clinic.</p> <p>Over 50 cancer patients or caregivers were questioned from January to June 2002 at The West Clinic, Memphis, Tenn., a private community oncology practice.</p>
<b>Patients</b>	Patients interviewed were mainly between 40 and 85 years of age and had various types of cancer, including colon, prostate, head and neck, breast, and lung tumors.
<b>Observations</b>	<p>The need for multiple visits in cancer treatment regimens has a substantial impact on the lives of both patients and their caregivers.</p> <p>Although patients generally accepted multiple visits as being necessary to their treatment, it was found that the time and expense associated with multiple clinic visits affected their ability to participate in many activities of daily life.</p> <p>Concerns resulting from multiple medical visits reported by patients and caregivers included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the need to take leave from work;</li> <li>• having to change or cancel social functions;</li> <li>• the inability to meet household and other responsibilities because of time constraints or depleted energy; and</li> <li>• the additional financial burden of transportation costs, expending funds available for food and daily activities.</li> </ul> <p>Patients with anemia and fatigue reported that visiting the clinic was an extra burden on their already low energy reserve.</p> <p>Coming to the clinic was also associated with psychological concerns, as some patients reported that these visits reinforced the perception of being “cancer patients” and prompted a sense of anxiety and sadness.</p>
<b>Conclusions</b>	This information underscores the negative impact of multiple medical visits on cancer patients and highlights the need to minimize the number of clinic visits, as this will have a positive impact on patients’ quality of life and will enable patients and caregivers to live as normal a life as possible.
<b>Discussion</b>	The multiple medical visits required for treatment of cancer, cancer symptoms, or side effects of chemotherapy may have a negative impact on quality of life, as underscored by the interview responses in this patient/caregiver survey. As a result, investigators believe using treatments that minimize the number of clinic visits may positively impact quality of life, enabling both patients and their caregivers to lead more “normal” lives.

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Multiple clinic visits take the patient away from everyday life and responsibilities. Frequent visits can limit daily activities, disrupt work schedules, diminish earning ability, and significantly reduce quality of life for patients and their caregivers. In some cases, multiple clinic visits may increase anxiety or even depression. Even short and focused visits for supportive care can result in significant interruptions of daily life.

There have been few studies that adequately address impact of medical visits on quality of life for both patients and their caregivers. Accordingly, investigators interviewed more than 50 patients and caregivers at a private community oncology practice in Memphis, Tenn. The interviews, conducted between January and June 2002, were open-ended and informal and sought to elicit views on the disease, its treatment, and clinic visits. Patients were primarily between 40 and 85 years of age and had various tumor types, including breast, lung, colon, head and neck, and prostate cancers.

Concerns related to clinic visits generally could be classified into the following categories:

- education and information (fear that the cancer is getting worse because the patient is always in the clinic),
- disruption of work or daily activities (patient is forced to quit a job or forego social activities),
- transportation (patient lives far away, and clinic visits become a “day” event),
- living arrangements (patient must move to be near the clinic),
- loss of function (lack of energy due to anemia and fatigue renders patient unable to finish other responsibilities),
- financial (transportation costs), and
- psychological (increased anxiety or depression).

Despite all the attention paid to how cancer symptoms, toxicities, and treatment can reduce quality of life, the clinic visit itself may have a substantial impact on quality of life, these interview responses suggest. Patients may find it difficult to regard themselves as “normal” if they are continually attending clinic appointments.

Every clinic visit represents another obstacle to leading a normal life and reinforces the patient's notion that cancer is consuming other aspects of a normal life. This concern may manifest itself as a sense of lost control. Redesigning the chemotherapy experience to require as few visits as possible may make a significant difference in the quality of life of cancer patients.

### Key Points

- Patients report that making multiple medical visits for treatment of cancer, cancer symptoms, or side effects of chemotherapy impacts negatively on their quality of life.
- Patients expressed a wide range of concerns related to clinic visits, from disruption of work or daily activities to loss of function, along with financial and psychological burdens.
- Treatments that minimize the number of clinic visits may positively impact quality of life, allowing patients and caregivers to lead more “normal” lives.

### References

Moore K, Fortner B. The impact of medical visits on patients with cancer. Paper presented at the 28th Annual Congress of the Oncology Nursing Society; May 1–4, 2003, Denver, Colo. Abstract 73.