

Cancer patients in their 60s are tech-savvy

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When cancer patients are given the choice, they are significantly more likely to use Web-based technology to answer questions about their quality of life six months after treatment, compared to a paper survey, according to a unique study presented at a scientific session, October 5, 2011, at the 53rd Annual Meeting of the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO).

This finding challenges the perception that older cancer patients do not have access to or are not comfortable using Web-based technology. Investigators found that a significant proportion of cancer patients averaging 64 years of age who participated in the study were computer-savvy and preferred using a keyboard to a pen or pencil to fill out a questionnaire.

"This Web-based survey is more convenient and less time-consuming for patients," Benjamin Movsas, MD, lead author for the study and chairman of [radiation oncology](#) at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, said. "It provides doctors with the data we need to share with our patients so they can make treatment choices that take into account quality of life issues."

Data related to quality of life issues is extremely important for patients with cancer; however, it has been challenging for doctors to receive consistent data about their patients' quality of life after treatment through the use of paper questionnaires.

The prospective study is part of a larger [Radiation Therapy Oncology](#)

Group (RTOG) randomized trial for early-stage [prostate cancer](#) patients that included a quality of life questionnaire. Findings showed that while 90 percent of patients completed the paper survey at the end of treatment, only 52 percent of patients did so six months after treatment. The most common reason cited for noncompliance was "institutional error."

Researchers wanted to find a new approach to increase participation in its quality of life questionnaire. The goal of the companion study was to determine if the compliance rate could increase from 52 to 75 percent using a Web-based system. Investigators used a HIPAA-secure Web-based technology, VisionTree Optimal Care, that can be accessed from any computer and offers email reminders to further increase compliance rates.

From September 2008 to December 2009, 49 prostate cancer patients who had an email address were involved in the study. Researchers found that the survey compliance rate six months after treatment increased from 52 to 90 percent (15 percent higher than their goal) when the Web-based technology was offered to patients.

The technology almost eliminated institutional error as a reason for noncompliance, since the Web-based system sent automatic email reminders to patients to encourage survey completion. A survey of research associates found that the system saved them an average of 10 minutes per quality of life form.

Movsas said, "We plan to use this new Web-based technology in studies for other cancer types, so we can better understand and ultimately improve the quality of life of additional [cancer patients](#)."

Provided by American Society for Radiation Oncology

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