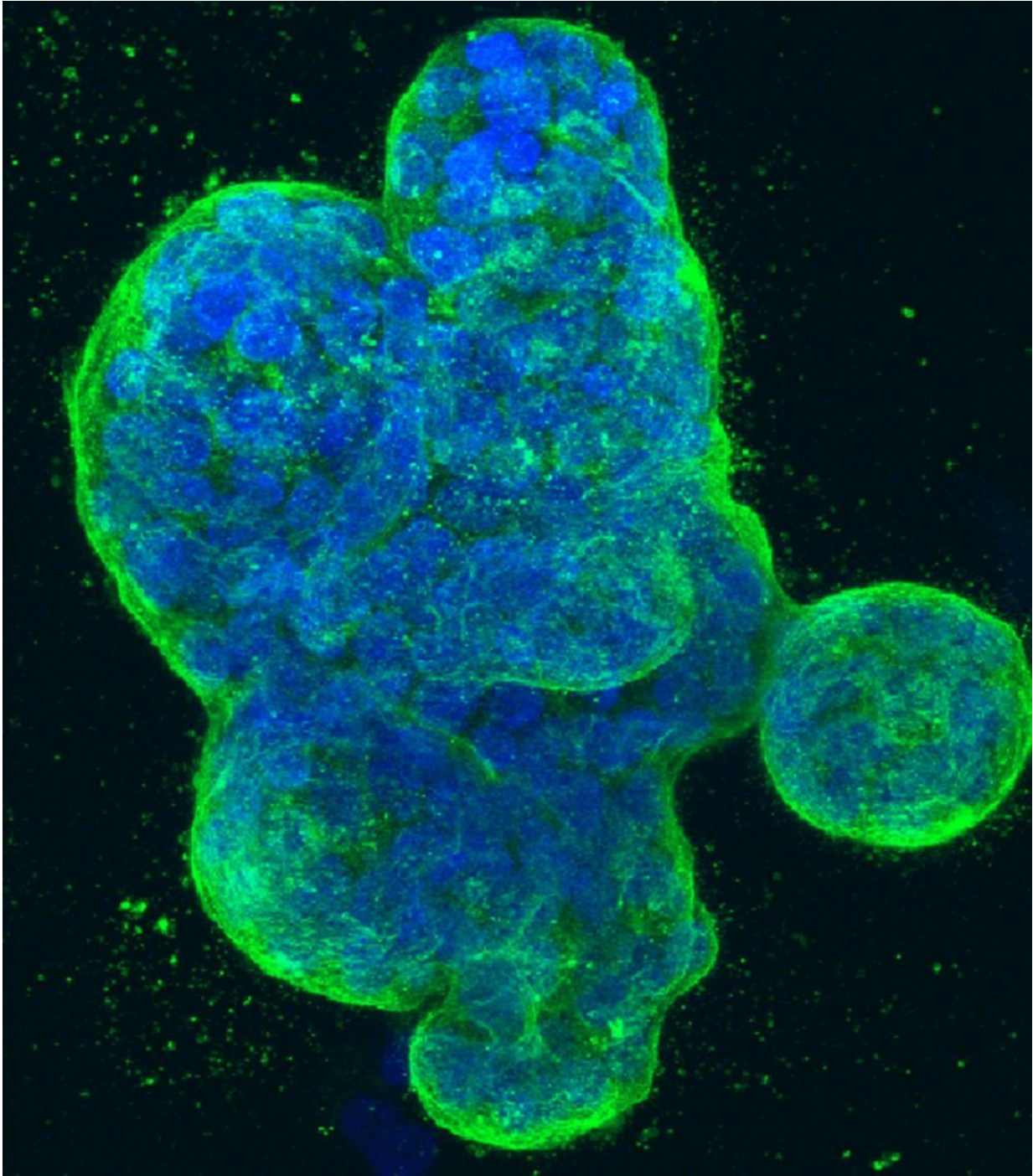


Most breast cancer patients' experiences with radiation therapy are better than expected

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Three-dimensional culture of human breast cancer cells, with DNA stained blue and a protein in the cell surface membrane stained green. Image created in 2014 by Tom Misteli, Ph.D., and Karen Meaburn, Ph.D. at the NIH IRP.

A new study reveals that many patients with breast cancer have misconceptions and fears about radiation therapy, but their actual experiences with modern breast radiation therapy are better than they expected. In the study published early online in *CANCER*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, most patients agreed that their initial negative impressions were unfounded.

Over the past 20 years, there have been significant advances in how [radiation](#) therapy for [breast cancer](#) is delivered, allowing clinicians to spare critical organs, create an individual radiation plan for each patient, and deliver radiation in more convenient schedules. Nonetheless, many patients have fears and misconceptions about radiation therapy.

To get a better sense of patients' views concerning modern radiation therapy, a team led by Susan McCloskey, MD, MSHS, and Narek Shaverdian, MD, of the University of California Los Angeles, surveyed 502 patients who were treated for breast [cancer](#) between 2012 and 2016. Among the 327 patients who responded to the survey, 83 percent underwent breast conservation therapy (defined as lumpectomy and radiation therapy).

"We wanted to look at the patients' perspective of the breast cancer radiation experience, to have tangible real-world data to guide future patients and providers in their decision making," said Dr. Shaverdian.

Sixty-eight percent of surveyed patients stated that they initially had little to no knowledge about radiation therapy; however, 47 percent reported that they had heard frightening stories about it. Only 2 percent of patients agreed that the negative stories they previously heard about radiation therapy were actually true. Also, 83 percent reported that short-term radiation side effects—such as breast pain, work limitations, and family disruptions—were less than or as expected, and 84 percent of patients said this about long-term side effects.

The survey revealed that 93 percent of breast conservation patients and 81 percent of mastectomy patients agreed with the statement "If future patients knew the real truth about radiation therapy, they would be less scared about treatment."

"The word radiation itself sounds frightening and is associated with many negative news stories, but the implications of this study are that, in actuality, radiation therapy for breast cancer is a much better treatment experience than perceived," said Dr. McCloskey. "We hope these real-world data from the voices of past patients can give future patients a better understanding of modern breast [radiation therapy](#) when making treatment decisions."

More information: Narek Shaverdian et al, The patient's perspective on breast radiotherapy: Initial fears and expectations versus reality, *Cancer* (2018). [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.31159](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.31159)

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