ABSTRACT

- Rural patients with cancer present with more advanced disease at diagnosis and experience worse survival compared to urban patients.
- Rural cancer patients face increased travel distance to care and may also lack reliable access to transportation for cancer screening and treatment.
- Minorities, those living in rural areas, and those residing in southern states were found to have approximately double the travel time to the nearest Cancer Center compared to the overall U.S. population.
- The degree of cancer care specializations further increased travel time. Cancer care requires specialty surgical and medical resources that are less likely to be found in rural areas which further increases the urban-rural health disparity.

MATERIALS & METHODS

- The Transportation Barriers Measure (TBM) is a well-established, validated measure of transportation barriers to access to healthcare within the urban setting. However, it was modified to include questions more specific to a rural setting.
- 10 cancer patients were interviewed at Vidant Health Center using a focus group approach.
- The TBM includes interview questions about means of transportation, difficulty arranging transportation, travel time, delayed or missed appointments due to travel time, cost of transportation, difficulties with public transportation, and difficulties with transportation to a pharmacy.
- Patients were asked to listen to the items to ensure that questions were understandable and straightforward. Responses were collected and the appropriate revisions were made.

RESULTS

The patient population for this study must meet the following criteria:

- Adult patient older than age 18 with a diagnosis of colorectal, pancreas, breast, or non-small cell lung cancer of any cancer stage
- Reside in a rural residence
- Treated at Vidant Medical Center in Greenville, North Carolina
- 10 cancer patients met the criteria, and qualitative interviews were conducted using the revised Transportation Barriers Measure for rural patients:
  - 6 were female, 4 were male
  - 3 were African American, 7 were Caucasian
  - Average time from home to Vidant = 64.5 minutes

DISCUSSION

Prior work has focused on calculated travel distance based on retrospective data using patient and cancer facility zip codes; however, little is known regarding travel time and specific transportation barriers from the rural patient perspective. This revised Transportation Barriers Measure was successfully administered to 10 patients and we have high hopes that this tool will serve to decrease occurrences of missed, rescheduled, or canceled appointments (including new, follow-up, and treatment visits) and improve the health of rural cancer patients.

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