

GUEST
EDITORIALPrecious Moments: Lessons
Learned During COVID-19

Benjamin Movsas, MD, FASTRO

Before I shared my own personal experience with coronavirus on an ASTRO (American Society for Radiation Oncology) video (www.rtonline.org/covid), I hesitated, as I never had a severe case and now, thank God, am recovered and back to work. Indeed, our thoughts and prayers go out to all those suffering from the coronavirus and also to family and friends of those who have tragically succumbed to this illness. So why share my relatively limited episode? Mostly to try and spread some hope so we keep in mind that there are also many people who fortunately have more mild cases and even more who get better and recover. I cannot thank everyone enough for the wonderful responses and support I have received in this regard. It means so much to me.

Even though my case was not severe, when you are so tired that you cannot get out of bed, yet your pulse ox is only 94%, it makes you wonder — what happens if my condition worsens? Beyond the need for social distancing, some of the most challenging aspects of coronavirus, despite our medical knowledge, are the many unknowns and the ultimate recognition of our vulnerability as humans.

Like the vast majority of radiation centers, the Henry Ford Cancer Institute (HFCI) Radiation Oncology Department continued to treat patients as clinically indicated during this pandemic, with guidance from our infectious disease colleagues to implement enhanced safety measures and precautions to protect cancer patients and staff. This includes social distancing for patients and staff, appropriate use of masks and personal protective equipment (PPE), as well as additional cleanings of our treatment units and department. Additionally, all Henry Ford patients and employees are screened prior to entering the facility.

Remarkably, during this period, the HFCI's radiation oncology treatment volumes averaged about 90%-plus of baseline. Staff who could work remotely did so (eg, physics and dosimetry staff, among others). We also have significantly increased the use of virtual consults and follow-ups. In addition to many helpful and daily communications/calls at the system level, our department had daily huddles, as well as conference calls several times a week to discuss specific issues related to radiation. The open and regular communications are key in this effort. The dedication and commitment of our entire team to safely treat our cancer patients during this time is truly inspirational.

As I mentioned on the video, this experience has definitely changed me. First, it has made me more grateful. More grateful to my wife and family who helped to care for me. More grateful to my wonderful cancer team here at HFCI who so expertly and safely treat our cancer patients, and, likewise, more grateful to each of you, my dedicated colleagues in radiation oncology who are working so hard to do the right thing for our cancer patients. Let's together all thank our tireless medical teams around the globe who are sacrificing each day to address this ongoing challenge.

Beyond this, I am changed in yet another way. One day I was walking with my wife on a beautiful sunny afternoon. And I was simply overwhelmed by a powerful feeling as I suddenly realized how precious this moment was — just to be able to walk outside, to take a deep breath, and to enjoy this with my wife. These are some of the precious moments in life that I hope to never again take for granted but to always cherish. So, what's next? Well, donating my plasma for one ... and applying these lessons learned to my daily life.

Dr. Movsas is the chair of the Department of Radiation Oncology, Henry Ford Cancer Institute, MI.