

## APAC study reveals impact of COVID-19 on hepatocellular carcinoma management

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**Well thought-through long-term strategies are required to ameliorate the negative impact of the pandemic on HCC patients**



The COVID-19 pandemic has altered healthcare priorities which may adversely impact cancer management. A recent study by the National Cancer Centre Singapore has aimed to evaluate the impact of the pandemic on the diagnosis, treatment, and consultation methods for patients with hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC).

The study conducted a survey among 27 hospitals from 14 Asia-Pacific (APAC) countries, collecting hospital-level information on the number of newly diagnosed HCC cases during a pre-pandemic period (February to May 2019) and for the same period during the pandemic.

A decline of 26.7% in new HCC cases was reported during the pandemic compared to the pre-pandemic. A sizable proportion of institutions reported delays in diagnosis, delays in treatment, changes in treatment modality, an increase in treatment complications, and no growth in clinical trial enrollments during the pandemic.

Furthermore, there was a decline of 27.3% in face-to-face patient consultations and an increase of 18.3% in video/telephonic consultations during the pandemic. A considerable variation in changes in HCC management was observed among countries.

The study suggests that alternatives to major surgical therapy such as less invasive surgery or oral systemic treatment for HCC if appropriate and options to face-to-face consultations such as telephonic and video consultations will have to be increasingly adopted to address the urgent clinical needs.

The authors call for healthcare authorities and healthcare service providers to re-assess the impact of policies on the diagnosis and treatment of HCC in line with the latest applicable management guidelines.