

## Principles to Guide Surgical Care as States Re-Open due to COVID-19

The US Oncology Network (The Network), is one of the nation's largest and most innovative networks of community-based oncology practices representing over 10,000 oncology physicians, nurses, clinicians and cancer care specialists nationwide and treating more than 995,000 cancer patients annually in more than 470 locations across 25 states.

The Network remains committed to its vision of expanding patient access to the highest quality, most cost-effective, integrated cancer care to help patients on their cancer journey. As advocates for our patients and the cancer community, we have a growing concern that the U.S. cancer population will be a silent and underrepresented casualty of the COVID-19 crisis. While necessary to reduce the risk of exposure and spread of the virus, restrictions on elective procedures have led to delayed diagnosis and treatment for many cancer patients. As states begin to reopen and surgical procedures commence, we believe it is critical to commit to a set of principles to guide surgical care.

### The Surgeons of The US Oncology Network believe in:

1. **Surgeon's Discretion:** A patient's need for surgery is at the primary discretion of the surgeon:
  - Cancer surgery or surgery for potential cancer must not be considered an elective procedure.
  - Cancer cases must remain in their own category of prioritization.
2. **Timely Care:** Delayed treatment can lead to an increased strain on our healthcare system due to an influx of patients presenting with advanced stage cancers:
  - Insurance companies should extend prior authorizations for cancer patients' who had their previously scheduled procedures cancelled.
  - Insurance companies should pre-authorize all patients who had their surgeries delayed and do not yet have a rescheduled surgery date.
3. **Seamless Coverage:** While substantial healthcare resources are being deployed to address the COVID-19 public health emergency, cancer patients are in continued need of treatment. A sizeable number of patients have lost coverage and do not qualify for state Medicaid programs and cannot afford alternative health insurance. Rising unemployment, loss of insurance, and delays in potentially curative surgical therapy will have an immediate impact on patients currently diagnosed with cancer:
  - Policymakers should consider options to bridge coverage gaps to ensure seamless cancer care for patients dealing with job loss during this crisis.
4. **Patient & Provider Safety:** Existing cancer patients are immunosuppressed and are delaying care to reduce possible exposure to COVID-19. Similarly, new patients are staying home, foregoing routine health screenings and/or treatment of potential cancer symptoms. It is critical to ensure the safety of patients and surgical operations teams:
  - As healthcare providers begin to regularly schedule procedures again, patients must feel confident they can safely seek treatment. We encourage physician offices and hospitals to provide clear, concise information to patients about measures being taken to protect their health and safety during treatment.
  - In order to protect patients and surgical teams from potential exposure, hospitals must be able to provide adequate supplies of personal protective equipment and sufficient access to COVID testing with rapid results in non-emergency cases.