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## A Neuroendocrine Tumor (NET) Patient Survey of Experiences with Telemedicine during the COVID-19 Pandemic



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**BACKGROUND:** The COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges to healthcare; especially in the treatment of patients with cancer. Because of the increased vulnerability of cancer patients, we have delayed in-person visits by expanding telemedicine. Telemedicine visits are accomplished either through video platforms or audio (telephone) alone. The New Orleans Louisiana Neuroendocrine Tumor Specialists (NOLANETS) is a specialty referral center for patients with NETs. The Neuroendocrine Cancer Awareness Network (NCAN) is a support group for patients with NETs. This study assessed NET patient's perceptions of their care using telemedicine during the pandemic.

**METHODS:** NET patients were asked to complete an online survey conducted by NCAN, or an identical paper survey conducted by NOLANETS. Data was pooled. This study was approved by Ochsner IRB.

**RESULTS:** Of the 247 patients, 47% (n=116) and 41% (n=102) rated their experience as Excellent or Good, respectively, on a numeric scale; while 11% (n=28) and 1% (n=2) rated their experience as Fair or Poor, respectively. Factors associated with suboptimal experience included: connection issues (14%,  $p < 0.0001$ ), and active treatment (28%,  $p = 0.033$ ). Patients who experienced connection issues were less likely to agree that their questions were answered ( $p = 0.004$ ) or that they wanted additional virtual visits ( $p = 0.004$ ). The telephone cohort (24%) rated their experience lower ( $p = 0.011$ ) as compared to video cohorts. A significant correlation was noted between cost savings and experience ( $p = 0.037$ ). Lastly, 16% (n=39) patients did not want further virtual visits.

Conclusion: While connection issues, audio-only platform, and active treatment significantly decreased the overall experience, we found that 88% of patients rated their experience as either Excellent or Good. Only 16% of patients stated they did not want further telemedicine visits. These results suggest that telemedicine may be an effective component of care for rare-cancer patients.

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