

ASCO: Cancer patients want to talk about costs with docs

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(HealthDay)—Although financial distress is common, even in insured patients, discussion of costs of cancer care with doctors rarely happens, according to research to be presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, held from May 31 to June 4 in Chicago.

S. Yousuf Zafar, M.D., M.H.S., of Duke University in Durham, N.C., and colleagues performed a cross-sectional study of insured adults with solid tumors who had been receiving anticancer therapy for one month or longer. In-person interviews of consecutive patients were conducted at

a referral center and three rural oncology clinics.

The researchers interviewed 302 participants (85 percent response rate) with a median age of 60 years and median income of \$60,000 per year; most (78 percent) had [incurable cancer](#). Even though the majority surveyed (58 percent) had [private health insurance](#), the mean score for the group reflected moderate [financial distress](#). The majority (52 percent) expressed any desire to talk about costs with their doctor, but only 19 percent said they had such discussions. Among 51 patients (17 percent) reporting high or overwhelming financial distress, only 13 (25 percent) had discussed financial concerns with the doctor. Overall, many (51 percent) claimed they wanted their doctors to consider costs in treatment decisions. Among those who discussed finances with their doctors, 57 percent thought that the discussion helped lower costs of care.

"With today's evolving health insurance landscape, cancer treatment-related costs to patients are more important than ever," Zafar said in a statement. "As providers, our team is convinced that cost discussions with our patients [are] important, and knowing that patients want to have these discussions should give us confidence in making this a routine practice."

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