Public release date: 5-Nov-2006

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Smokers have worse side effects from radiation treatment for prostate cancer

Smoking has been found to contribute to poorer outcomes for people treated for many kinds of cancer and now, researchers at Fox Chase Cancer Center have associated smoking and acute side-effects following radiation therapy for prostate cancer. The study was presented today at the 48th Annual Meeting of the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology in Philadelphia.

Smoking is associated with an increased risk of radiation-related side effects in cancers of the head and neck, cervix, lung and breast. For this study, researchers analyzed the impact of smoking on gastrointestinal (GI) and genitourinary (GU) side effects for 1,194 patients with prostate cancer treated at Fox Chase Cancer Center with 3D conformal radiation therapy between 1991 and 2001. Smoking information collected prior to treatment included status as a current smoker, ex-smoker or non-smoker. Patients treated with androgen deprivation prior to or during treatment were excluded.

"Our patients who smoked during treatment reported having more acute gastrointestinal side-effects such as diarrhea," said Niraj Pahlajani, M.D., lead author on the study and a resident in the radiation oncology department at Fox Chase.

"Fortunately, smoking didn't appear to impact long-term GI side effects or genitourinary side-effects. These results underscore the importance of smoking cessation prior to radiation therapy."

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