Head and Neck Cancer Care in a Pandemic

Prioritizing Safe Care

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Foreword

would like to express my admiration and appreciation for the remarkable head and neck cancer surgeons who have so rapidly created this timely and highly relevant book on caring for head and neck cancer patients during the COVID pandemic. These authors represent the best of our field, and their selflessness in devoting time and energy to this text speaks to their generosity. The lessons we have learned, and are learning, about adapting our care for COVID patients are critical to disseminate quickly.

As a head and neck surgeon, I have always been focused on how cancer care is delivered. But in March of 2020, I became a COVID patient. I initially shrugged it off, thinking that I would treat it like a flu. Much to my chagrin, my course of illness was much more severe, as I was hospitalized for 10 days. I have shared my extended course of recovery ["The Worst Patientm," JAMA Oto, published online, August 20, 2020; doi:10.1001/jamaoto.2020.2435], but I also want to make it clear that I understand that I am absolutely one of the lucky ones. During the early period when I was admitted, the mortality rate of our COVID inpatients was 9%, and I will be forever grateful that I have made it back.

I am also a little wiser. It turns out diseases other than cancers of the oral cavity and

pharynx and larynx are lethal! For those who wonder whether we were right to delay care for a bit in the spring of this year, as we tried to figure out how to respond to the epidemic, I will say that the thoughtfulness was worth it. We have learned so much about COVID in this time. My 86-year-old mother contracted COVID from her assisted living facility and was admitted to the same facility where I had been discharged two weeks before. We expected the worst. But she made it out in six days-faster than me-and I personally witnessed the tremendous improvement care that she received. From my upfront seat, it seemed like years of progress had been made in those two weeks. Had the timing of our hospitalizations been reversed, she may not have made it.

And that is the reason for this book. The tremendous acceleration and accumulation of what we now know has been summarized elegantly in this volume. I know most surgeons will focus on the surgical chapters, but I hope you will also carefully consider the chapters on COVID's educational and social impact. I appreciate what it is like to be constantly worried about infecting the doctors and nurses and therapists who risk their well-being to care for you. I empathize with what it is like to be a deteriorating patient with a newly discovered disease, without a curriculum of study to

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guide understanding. And I understand what it is like to be ill, without family allowed to visit or to comfort, and for your family to be completely in the dark about the fate of their loved one. Going through a serious disease like this will do that for you. The supportive treatments

that complement anti-neoplastic care allow us to take care of the whole patient and family and allow us to become better physicians.

> In gratitude, Bevan Yueh

Preface

The Editors

t is unusual to write a book in the midst of an event like the COVID-19 pandemic that we are experiencing just now, even though the end is nowhere in sight.

This book, however, is written in the context of cancers of the head and neck and how the pandemic impacts the treatment and care of these patients who are suffering from malignancies. Cancers continuously and steadily advance and spread. While we wait for definitive treatments for COVID-19, such as vaccination, we cannot delay or defer treatments for cancers. Every delay can prove costly. What is operable and treatable today might become inoperable and untreatable if we delay treatment. Patients with cancers are thought to be immunocompromised and, thus, are vulnerable to infection. The cause of COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, has proven to be extraordinarily contagious and can afflict the body's system in numerous ways, impeding the delivery of time-dependent, important, and much needed treatment. The dilemma lies in situations, such as when a patient suffering from head and neck cancer is simultaneously struck with COVID-19. Many differing situations can present themselves, and the treating physician needs to decide which problem gains precedence in priority and when to intervene with treatment directed at addressing cancer.

The patient who suffers from cancer may also present with comorbidities that may further complicate treatment. In addition, the patient may require modalities like radiation and chemotherapy in the course of their treatment. All these complexities need to be given careful consideration when working during the raging COVID pandemic.

Many of us are searching for answers while we simultaneously deal with the SARS-CoV-2. How do we deliver safe, effective, and comprehensive treatment to patients who suffer from cancer while simultaneously dealing with the COVID-19 that is in our midst? Inventiveness, teamwork, and thoughtful planning are required. All of us owe our patients this much. This book is an attempt to address all these complex issues involving decision-making and shared experience and knowledge so that those combating these problems on multiple fronts can use this as a compass to chart a course for the treatment of their patients.

We humbly acknowledge that there are many questions that still need to be answered. Our book is dedicated to all those brave and selfless men and women, healthcare givers and healthcare receivers, and their families who have been directly affected by this pandemic. We also thank the individuals and the numerous organizations from all over the world who

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have donated generously towards the safety and comfort of all the healthcare workers on the frontlines. We hope that this book does indeed make a beneficial difference in the lives of our patients and in the lives of those who have dedicated their days and nights to caring for others, even in times of pandemic.

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