

Standardizing Hepatocellular Carcinoma Surveillance in Veterans Diagnosed with Cirrhosis

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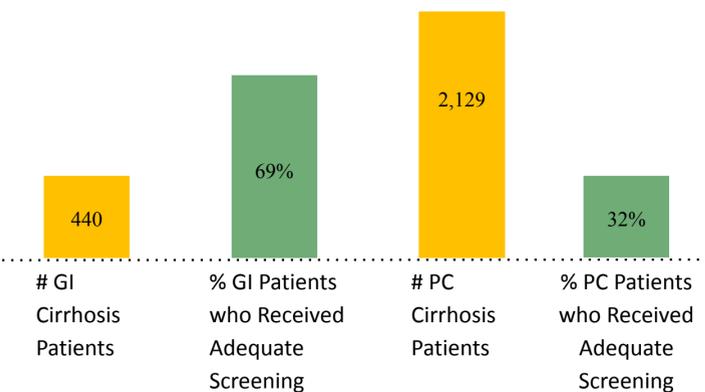
INTRODUCTION

- As the leading provider of cirrhosis care, the Veterans Health Administration must be intentional in surveilling patients for the most common type of liver cancer, hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC).
- Cirrhosis is the strongest risk factor for developing HCC.
- HCC is the most common type of primary liver cancer.
- Primary liver cancer is the sixth most common cancer worldwide and third leading cause of cancer-related deaths.
- Guidance from the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) on the prevention of HCC in cirrhosis patients recommends that patients undergo screening every six months, which includes an abdominal ultrasound.

BACKGROUND

There is a discrepancy in HCC surveillance practices in patients with decompensated cirrhosis who follow with GI specialists and those with compensated cirrhosis who are seen by primary care providers in the precepting agency.

Percentage of Adequate Screening in Cirrhosis Patients During 2024 Organized by Treating Specialty



PICO QUESTION

In veterans with a cirrhosis diagnosis, does increasing primary care provider education to standardize HCC screening practices throughout the precepting agency, compared to current practices, increase HCC surveillance compliance in the primary care setting?

RESULTS

- After education was completed, according to the “Advanced Liver Disease” dashboard, HCC surveillance compliant with AASLD guidelines increased from 42.4% to 44.2%, while the percentage of patients who were overdue and not reviewed reduced from 54.4% to 52.9%.
- Continuing education and review of screening guidelines will be beneficial to promote the reduction of provider-level barriers and maintain an open dialogue regarding all system-, provider-, and patient-level barriers.

CONCLUSIONS

- To ensure high-quality and accessible care to all veterans diagnosed with cirrhosis and decrease patient mortality, primary care providers must ensure HCC screening appointments are scheduled at the appropriate time intervals.
- Utilizing population management tools such as the “Liver Cancer (HCC) Screening” clinical reminder and “Advanced Liver Disease” dashboard is fundamental to the maintenance of HCC screening compliance.
- Through increased education on the evidence-based guidelines for HCC preventative care and the VA’s National Gastroenterology and Hepatology Program, equity, safety, and advocacy for patients are improved.

METHODS AND IMPLEMENTATION

- A comprehensive literature review in the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), PubMed, and Scopus databases was completed to determine the most up to date evidence-based protocols for improving HCC screening.
- Additionally, a SWOT and Gap analysis were conducted to determine the most effective method for improving HCC screening rates.
- The most highly noted provider-level barrier to HCC surveillance is a lack of awareness and knowledge among primary care providers. Therefore, this project to standardize the HCC surveillance process focused on primary care staff education.

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