Patient Reported Impact of Lung Cancer

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Conclusions

The research highlights the devastating impact of lung cancer on patients as well as impediments to creating the best short- and long-term health outcomes. It also highlights the myriad delays to getting an early-stage diagnosis.

Clinical Implication

The oncologist-patient experience is very positive. Discussing the physical, emotional, financial, and quality of life impact of lung cancer can help create even more positive patient experiences. Importantly, removing roadblocks such as lack of access to mental health services or financial resources can foster better outcomes for all lung cancer patients.

Purpose

A lung cancer diagnosis often comes late stage and can have a devastating impact on patients emotionally, physically, and financially. Research was undertaken to understand the path to diagnosis, impact of lung cancer on quality of life and the oncologist-patient relationship.

Method

In October 2024, an email invitation to an online survey was sent to US members of MyLungCancerTeam who have been diagnosed with non-small cell lung cancer. In total, 235 members participated in the survey. Two-thirds (66%) were diagnosed within the past two years, 50% have stage 3 or 4 lung cancer, and the majority are 60 or older (90%).

Results

For two-thirds of the respondents (62%), it took seeing 2 or more different doctors to get a diagnosis. An impediment to a faster diagnosis for 35% was either an incorrect diagnosis or a diagnosis that focused on a comorbidity but missed lung cancer as a cause of troubling symptoms. (Figure 1)

For those experiencing any type of symptoms prior to a diagnosis, most common symptoms can be associated with myriad other types of health issues (e.g., shortness of breath, fatigue, or coughing). (Figure 2)

Comorbidities experienced include hypertension (48%), high cholesterol (36%), and COPD (31%). (Figure 3)

The negative impact of lung cancer is pervasive. Many patients experience anxiety (75%) or depression (64%). Most (75%) feel it has impacted their overall quality of life and 73% struggle to stay physically active. (Figure 4) Despite the mental health challenges, only 55% have convenient access to mental health resources and only 36% indicate their lung cancer doctor asks about their mental health.

Fatigue (53%), depression, or anxiety (46%), and dealing with treatment side effects (38%) create the biggest obstacles to managing lung cancer. (Figure 5)

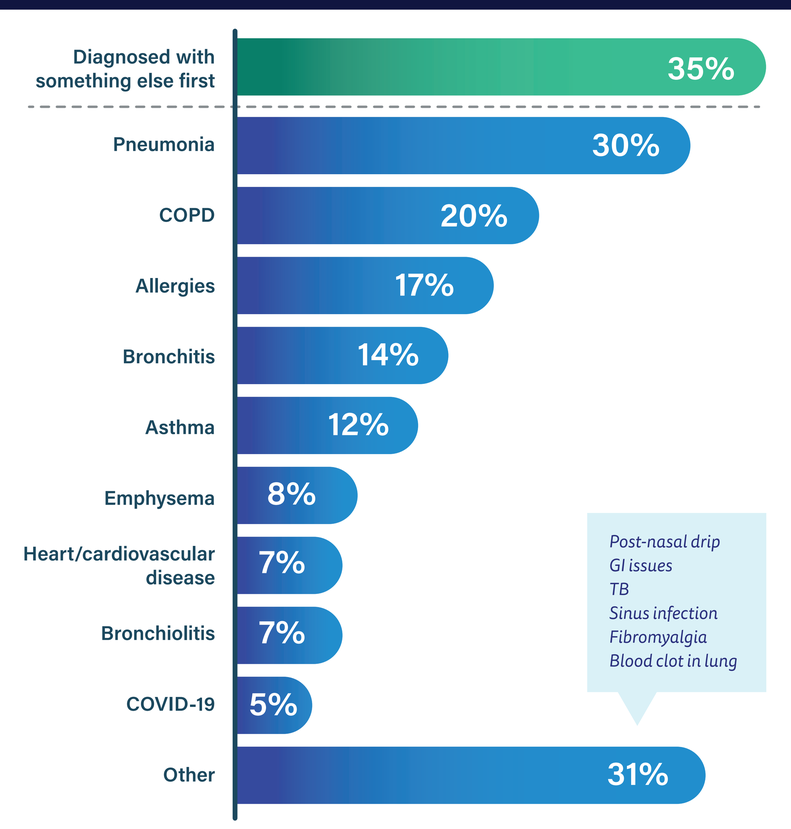
Given the seriousness of lung cancer, most have been able to get needed appointments (96%), learn about and get access to the most effective treatments (91%, 86%) and get insurance approvals (80%). Yet 34% are struggling to afford their treatment costs (Figure 6). A quarter (23%) had to retire early due to their diagnosis, creating further financial hardship.

Satisfaction is quite high for the doctor treating lung cancer (73%). The majority of patients report that their doctor is deeply engaging with them, including explaining test results or prognosis in an easy-to-understand manner (83%), spending enough time with them (70%), and treating them with respect (86%) in a non-judgmental way (70%). (Figure 7)

Half (50%) have undergone biomarker testing. (Figure 8)

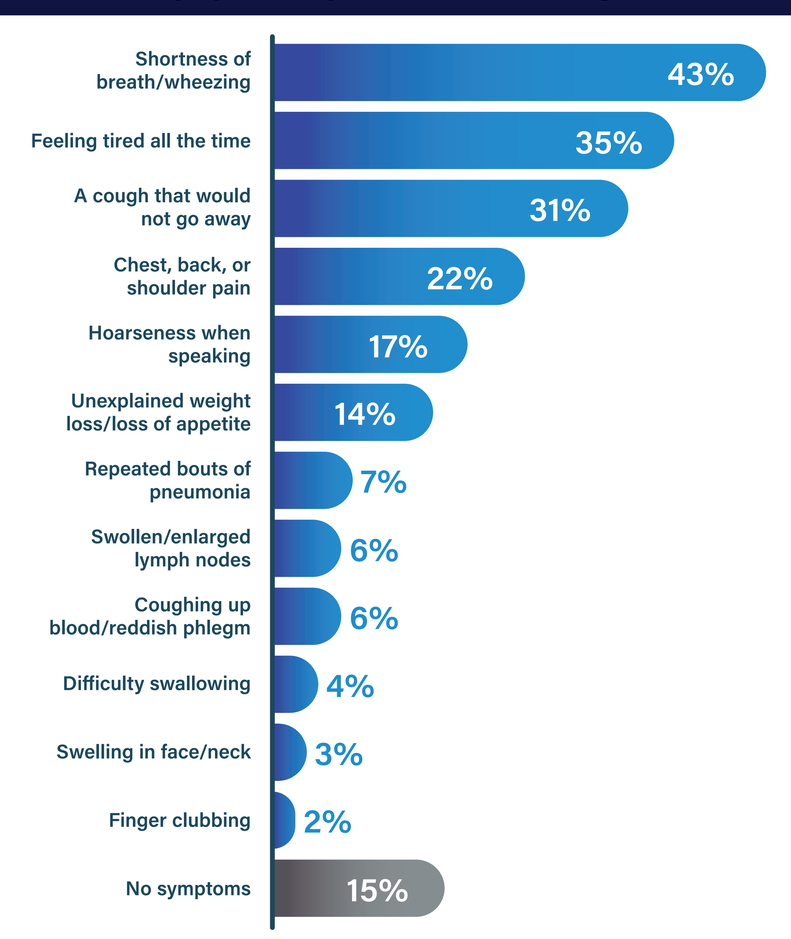
CHEST 2025

FIGURE 1. Diagnosis Before Lung Cancer



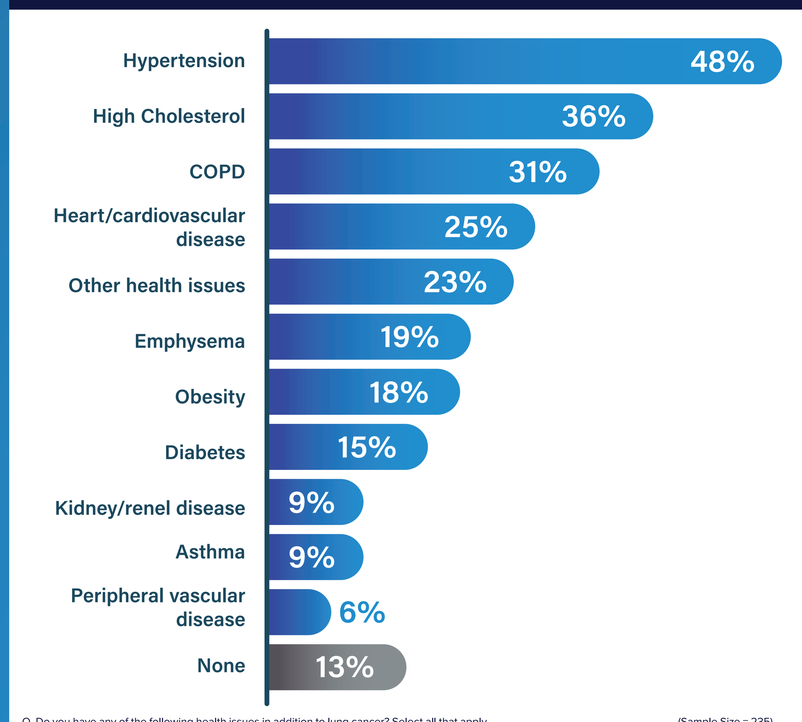
Q. What were you first diagnosed with? Select any that apply. (Asked of those first diagnosed with something else) (Sample Size = 83)

FIGURE 2. Symptoms Experienced Prior to Diagnosis



Q. What symptoms were you experiencing prior to being diagnosed with lung cancer? Select any that apply. (Sample Size = 235)

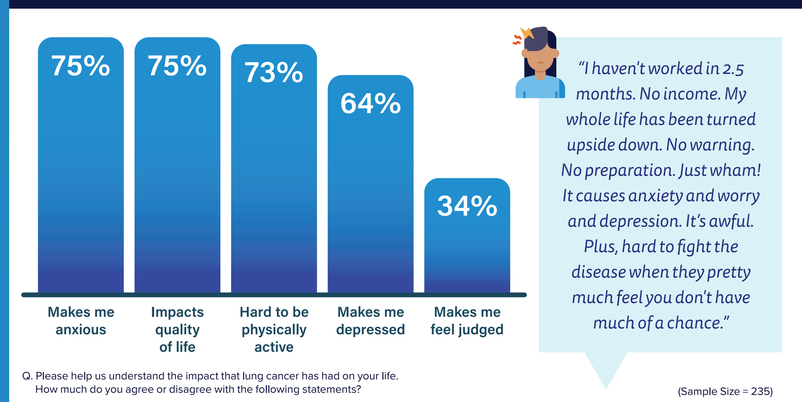
FIGURE 3. Comorbidities



Q. Do you have any of the following health issues in addition to lung cancer? Select all that apply (Sample Size = 235)

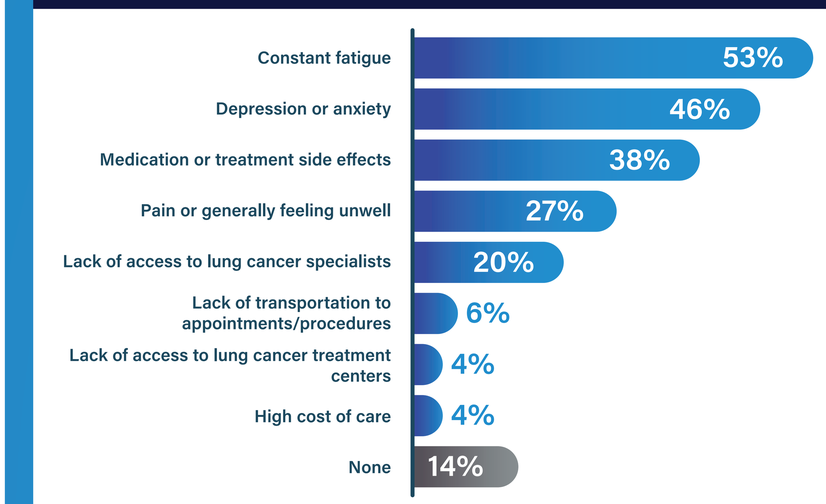
FIGURE 4. Impact on Quality of Life

% Strongly/Somewhat Agreeing



Q. Please help us understand the impact that lung cancer has had on your life. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Sample Size = 235)

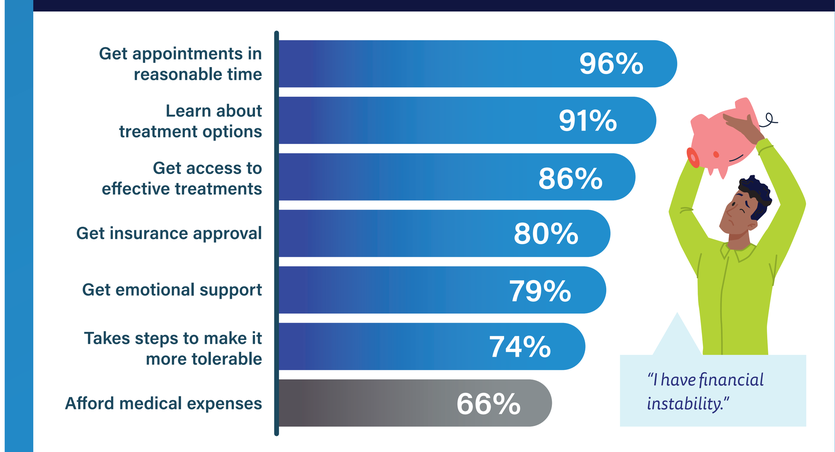
FIGURE 5. Biggest Obstacles to Taking Care of Self



Q. What are the biggest obstacles you face in taking care of yourself and managing your lung cancer? Select all that apply. (Sample Size = 235)

FIGURE 6. Steps Taking in Living With Lung Cancer

% Strongly/Somewhat Agreeing

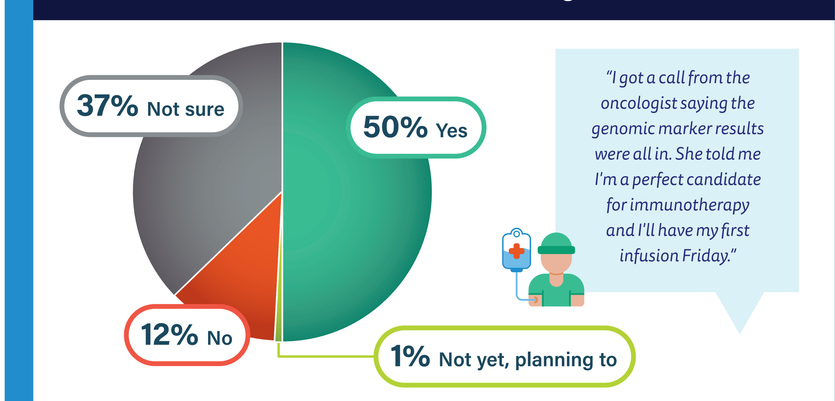


Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Sample Size = 235)

FIGURE 7. HCP Conversations

Q. Which of the following reflect the discussions you have with the primary healthcare provider who treats your lung cancer? Please select all that apply. (Asked of those seeing an HCP) (Sample Size = 233)

FIGURE 8. Undertaken Biomarker Testing



Q. Have you undergone or are you planning to do biomarker testing? (Sample Size = 235)