

Proton therapy may improve outcomes, quality of life for anal cancer patients

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A clinical trial hosted at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center/UC Health Proton Therapy Center is currently examining proton therapy as a potential treatment for anal cancer.

Researchers are working to use this type of radiation therapy as a means of improving outcomes for anal cancer – one of the most difficult cancers to treat without debilitating side effects.

“There were 7,270 cases of anal cancer in the U.S. in 2015 and around 1,000 deaths caused by this cancer,” Jordan Kharofa, an assistant professor in the department of radiation oncology at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, said. “Current standard treatment for this cancer is typically five weeks of radiation with chemotherapy administered twice during that time, and side effects could include urinary irritability as well as bowel and skin issues; additionally, long-term bowel issues, sexual dysfunction, hip fractures and more could occur as a result of standard radiation.”

Proton therapy is more precise than traditional methods of treatment, targeting a tumor site without damaging healthy tissue. This treatment is offered alongside the clinical trial at the center, which is one of only 25 facilities in the country with a gantry (radiation treatment room with a moveable beam) exclusively dedicated to cancer research.

“The toxicities experienced by anal cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy and radiation are quite challenging,” Kharofa said. “Approximately 60 to 75 percent of patients have moderate to severe side effects. We believe that proton therapy will help us decrease the amount of radiation delivered to outside organs and potentially reduce some of these detrimental effects, both short- and long-term.”

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