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Impact of COVID-19 on Online Interest in Urologic Conditions: A Google Trends Analysis

COVID-19 led to isolation measures for preventative care and altered the population's interests in Urology. Google trends was utilized to analyze online interest in twelve common urologic conditions in the United States from October 1, 2018 to August 1, 2021 (divided into Pre-COVID and COVID time periods at March 1, 2020). Search volume index (SVI) values, a measure of relative search volume on Google, for the USA, top queried states, and top populated states, along with rising and top queries were retrieved and analyzed for all conditions. Pre-COVID and COVID median SVIs were compared using the Mann Whitney U test and correlations were analyzed using the Spearman's rank order correlation test. For all urologic conditions, rising and top queries were related to symptoms, treatments, or COVID-19. Compared to Pre-COVID, COVID showed higher SVIs for erectile dysfunction (Median (IQR), 48.0 (7.0) vs 51.0 (8.5), p=0.04) and lower SVIs for bladder cancer (76.0 (11.0) vs 69.0 (13.5), p<0.01), hematuria (83.0 (8.0) vs 74.0 (11.5), p<0.01), kidney cancer (48.0 (10.0) vs 41.0 (13.5), p<0.01), kidney stones (85.0 (7.0) vs 83.0 (8.0), p=0.03), and prostate cancer (85.0 (8.0) vs 80.0 (15.5), p<0.01). A correlation to COVID searches was seen for bladder cancer (RS=-0.36, p<0.01), erectile dysfunction (RS=0.20, p=0.04), hematuria (RS=-0.31, p<0.01), overactive bladder (RS=-0.23, p=0.04), and prostate cancer (RS=-0.33, p<0.01). No significant differences were found for BPH, interstitial cystitis, low testosterone, urinary incontinence, and UTIs. Online interest in malignancies decreased, which may translate to delayed diagnosis and treatment and be a cause for concern. Erectile dysfunction showed increasing interest during the pandemic, potentially due to research or misinformation linking it to COVID-19.