

Prior Authorization and Cancer Patient Care

Executive Summary of a Nationwide Physician Survey, April 2019

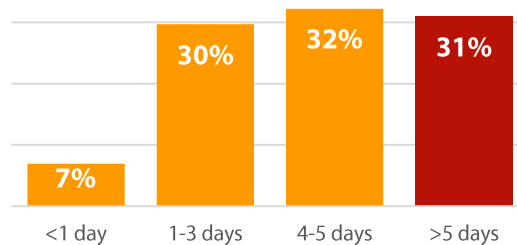
In the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) 2018 annual member survey, radiation oncologists — physicians who treat cancer patients using radiation — named prior authorization as the greatest challenge facing the field. To determine the extent of the burden on patients treated by these physicians, ASTRO launched an additional nationwide survey of radiation oncologists in late 2018. Findings make clear that restrictive prior authorization practices cause unnecessary delays and interference in care decisions for cancer patients. Included below are key findings; for more information, visit www.astro.org/priorauthorization.

Prior authorization negatively impacts cancer patient outcomes.

Nearly all radiation oncologists (93%) said their patients are delayed from life-saving treatments, and a third (31%) said the **average delay lasts longer than five days** — a full week of standard radiation treatments. These findings are cause for alarm given [research](#) linking each week of delay in starting cancer therapy with a 1.2% to 3.2% increased risk of death.

What is the average length of treatment delay your patients experience due to prior authorization requirements?

(n=633)

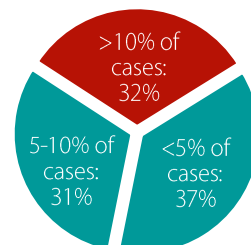


More than 7 in 10 radiation oncologists (73%) said their **patients regularly express concern** to them about the delay caused by prior authorization (n=624).

More than 3 in 10 radiation oncologists (32%) were **forced to use a different therapy** for a substantial number of their patients (>10%) due to prior authorization delays.

In what portion of cases do you utilize a different therapy due to prior authorization delays?

(n=624)

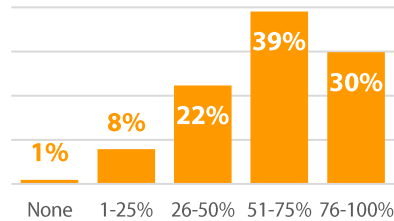


Prior authorization takes physicians away from caring for their patients.

Most requests submitted by radiation oncologists are initially approved. Moreover, nearly two-thirds of respondents (62%) said most denials they receive from prior authorization review are **overturned on appeal**.

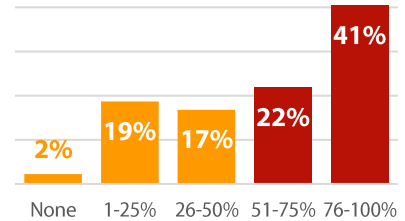
What portion of your prior authorization requests are initially approved?

(n=633)



What portion of denied requests generally are approved upon appeal?

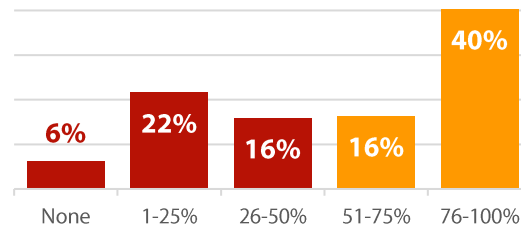
(n=632)



More than 4 in 10 respondents (44%) said their peer-to-peer reviews typically are **not conducted by a radiation oncologist**.

What portion of your peer-to-peer reviews are performed by a radiation oncologist?

(n=632)



Radiation oncology benefit management companies (ROBMs) required 85% of radiation oncologists to **generate multiple treatment plans** at some point in the review process, requiring physicians and medical physicists to spend hours developing alternatives to their recommended course of treatment.

What additional information do Radiation Oncology Benefit Managers request?

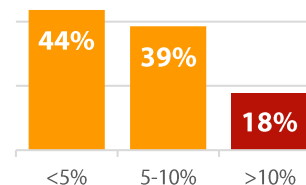
(n=625)



Nearly 1 in 5 radiation oncologists (18%) said they lose more than 10% of time that they could be caring for their patients focused instead on dealing with prior authorization issues. An additional 39% spend 5-10% of their average workday on prior authorization.

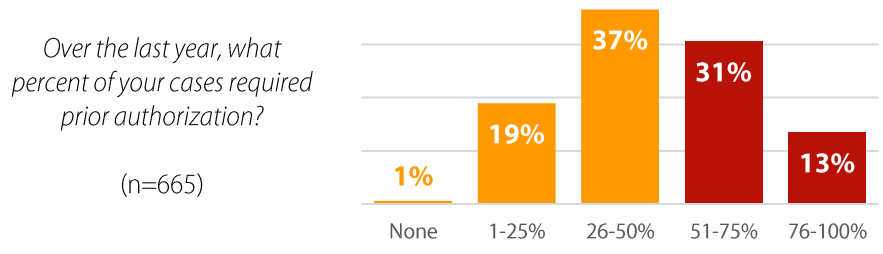
In an average month, how much of your workday do you personally spend on the prior authorization process?

(n=671)

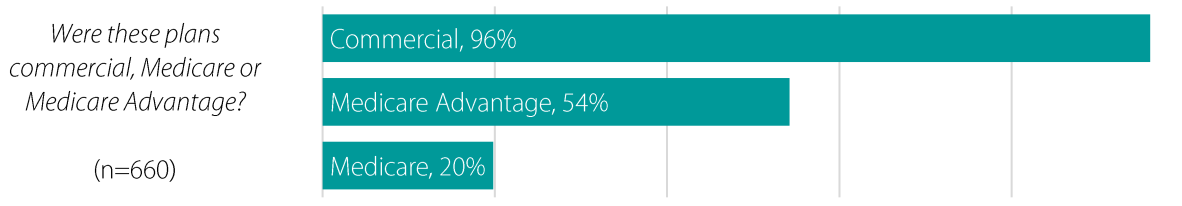


Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) said they or their practice had to **hire additional staff** in the last year to manage the prior authorization process (n=668).

More than 4 in 10 radiation oncologists (44%) needed prior authorization for at least half of their treatment recommendations. An additional third (37%) needed it for more than a quarter of their cases.

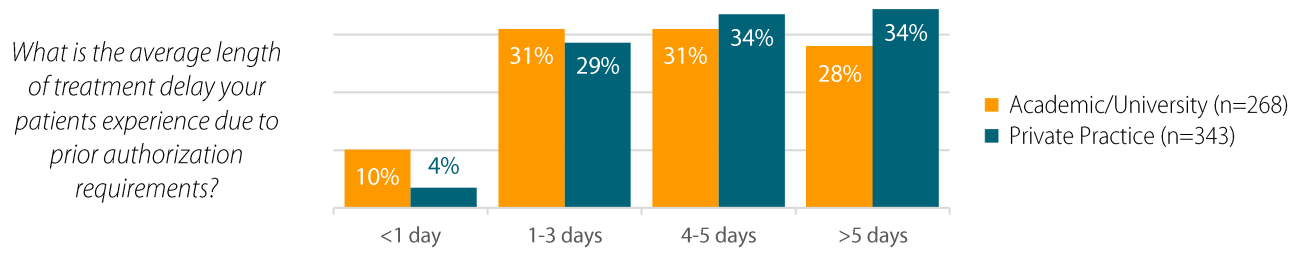


Private insurers were the most likely type of health coverage organization to require prior authorization, although more than half of the radiation oncologists (54%) also said treatment decisions for patients on Medicare Advantage plans triggered prior authorization review.

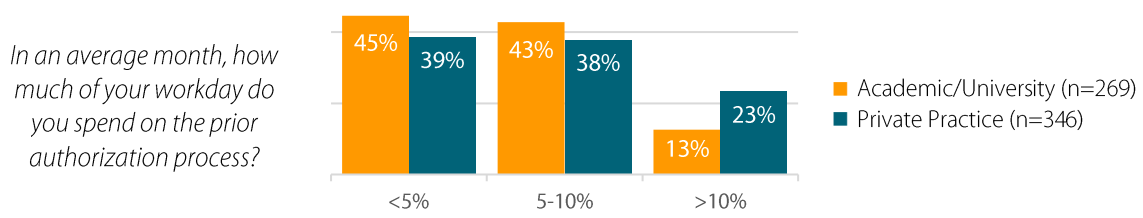


Prior authorization disproportionately burdens patients at community clinics.

Patients treated at community-based, private practices **experience longer delays** due to prior authorization than those seen at academic centers. For example, average treatment delays lasting longer than a week were reported by 34% of private practitioners versus 28% of academic physicians ($p=0.005$).



Radiation oncologists in private practice are **almost twice as likely** to spend more than 10% of their day focused on prior authorization, compared to physicians at academic centers (23% vs. 13%, $p=0.003$).



Survey Methodology

An online survey was sent to all 3,882 U.S. based, practicing radiation oncologists in ASTRO's member database, and 620 physicians completed the survey via email. Survey invitations were sent by email in December 2018, with one email reminder in January 2019, and the survey closed in February 2019. ASTRO staff also administered paper surveys at the ASTRO Annual Meeting in October 2018 and collected 53 responses. Findings reflect the combined total of 673 radiation oncologist responses.

Survey respondents were representative of the ASTRO membership. Radiation oncologists who completed the survey worked mostly for private practice/community-based systems (56%) or academic/university systems (43%). Most physicians treat patients primarily at hospital-based locations (67%) or freestanding/satellite clinics (32%). Respondents typically practiced in urban or suburban communities (45% and 42%, respectively), with fewer from rural communities (13%).

About ASTRO

The American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) is the world's largest radiation oncology society, with more than 10,000 members who are physicians, nurses, biologists, physicists, radiation therapists, dosimetrists and other health care professionals who specialize in treating patients with radiation therapies. The Society is dedicated to improving patient care through professional education and training, support for clinical practice and health policy standards, advancement of science and research, and advocacy.

ASTRO publishes three medical journals, [International Journal of Radiation Oncology • Biology • Physics](#), [Practical Radiation Oncology](#) and [Advances in Radiation Oncology](#); developed and maintains an extensive patient website, [RT Answers](#); and created the nonprofit foundation [Radiation Oncology Institute](#).

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