Purpose/Objectives

Radiation therapy (RT) is effective in reducing pain associated with bone metastases. For patients requiring CT-based radiation planning, wait time for a CT simulation appointment following the new patient evaluation often delays the start of treatment, postponing potential benefits conferred by palliative RT. The purpose of this study was to develop a protocol designed to reduce the time from new patient evaluation to the time of CT simulation to less than three business days.

Methods

• Includes patients treated for painful bone metastases
• All were treated with a 3-dimensional conformal radiation therapy (3D-CRT) technique
• A protocol was developed in which the treating radiation oncologist utilized pre-specified text to request the 3D-CRT treatment in the patient’s electronic medical record that subsequently alerted staff to the patient’s eligibility for the study
• Staff then worked to schedule the CT simulation within three business days from the new patient evaluation
• Patients meeting inclusion criteria were identified through review of our institutional radiation oncology patient information management system

Results

• Baseline data showed that 50% of patients had a planning CT within the target timeline
• Goal was to improve the percentage to 60% for 3 of 4 quarters
• The target was met in the third quarter

Conclusions

After instituting a quality improvement protocol at our institution, a significant reduction in the percentage of patients waiting longer than three business days from the time of new patient consult to the time of CT simulation for treatment of bone metastasis with 3DCRT was noted. The new protocol harnessed existing medical records systems and authorization processes. Future work should examine the impact of reduced CT simulation wait time on time to radiation initiation and on patient satisfaction and pain relief.