

Emergency Department Utilization After Chemotherapy at Southcoast Health Cancer Care (SCHCC): From CMS OP-35 Benchmarking to Action

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Southcoast Health Cancer Care

Background

CMS OP-35 evaluates rate of ED visits within 30 days of chemotherapy administration, to qualify/reduce ED visits and admissions, and to improve their QOL. SCHCC sought to evaluate its OP-35 performance and identify opportunities to improve outpatient management of treatment-related symptoms. If a patient's unmet needs are reduced and gaps in care diminished, then ED visits should be reduced. Potential cost savings for patient management in an outpatient setting exists. However, the increasing patient volumes and the growing complexity of cancer therapies further challenge outpatient management of treatment-related symptoms.

CMS data on rate of OP_35 and number of patients included in their calculations (by state)

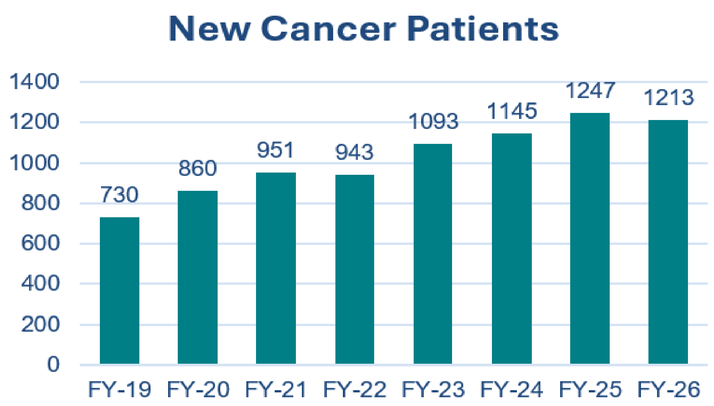
STATE (geographical area)	Rate of ED visits for cancer patients (2023 data) CMS designation OP-35* (%)	CMS data (number of patients included in calculations)
Me/Vt H1	5.8	340
Me/Vt H2	7.1	771
NH H1	5.1	80
NH H2	5.2	224
NH H3	4.5	252
NH H4	7.8	1128
RI H1	4.7	792
RI H2	5.4	75
SE Ma H1	4.1	561
SE Ma H2	5.1	301
SE Ma H3	4.3	246
SE Ma H4	4.8	450

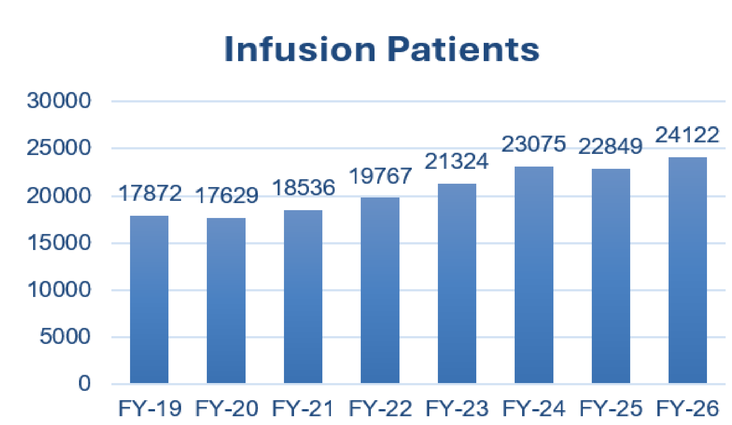
*CMS data for study period had a national average of 5.5%

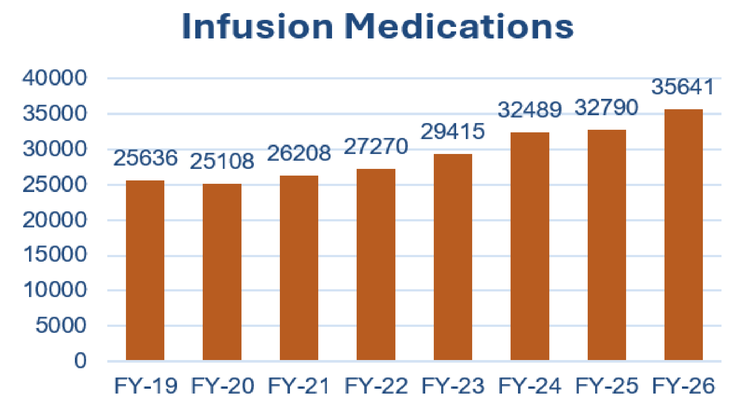
Methods and Materials

SCHCC evaluated CMS published data for ED visits for patients receiving chemotherapy (1/1/2023 through 12/31/2023, published 2/19/2025). Staff looked at other institutions' results (our area and Northern New England). Lastly, SCHCC evaluated six months (1/1/2026 through 6/30/2026) of data looking at ED visits within 14 days of receiving chemotherapy, which was an internal quality-improvement analysis informed by OP-35.

SCHCC Volume/Growth







Results

With respect to Southcoast Health: common reasons for ED visits included: GI, weakness/fatigue, fever/infection, pain. Of 291 patients that visited the ED during our review period, 144 patients were admitted. 113 contacted the clinic prior to the ED. 204 patients who visited the ED did not have immediate communication with Oncology staff after ED visit. As our volume and number of treatments has increased consistently over the past years, the need for better patient follow-up has as well.

With respect to other institutions in New England: rate of ED visits for cancer patients under CMS designation OP-35 were at or near the national average of 5.5%. Larger cancer centers with multiple community hospitals in the group did not perform as well, this was expected.

Conclusions

Opportunities identified included increased utilization of oncology urgent care visits, standardized use of symptom-management algorithms, standardized post-ED follow-up, and enhanced patient education regarding treatment-related symptoms and when to contact the oncology team. Targeting these gaps may facilitate earlier management, improve continuity of oncology care, and reduce avoidable ED visits.

About Southcoast Health

Southcoast Health is a not-for-profit, community-based health system with multiple access points, offering an integrated continuum of health services throughout southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island. At Southcoast Health Cancer Care, our team of experienced healthcare professionals bring a higher level of technology, treatment and expertise to the South Coast region. The Cancer Program at Southcoast Health continues in its mission to meet the growing need for comprehensive cancer services.

Acknowledgments

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