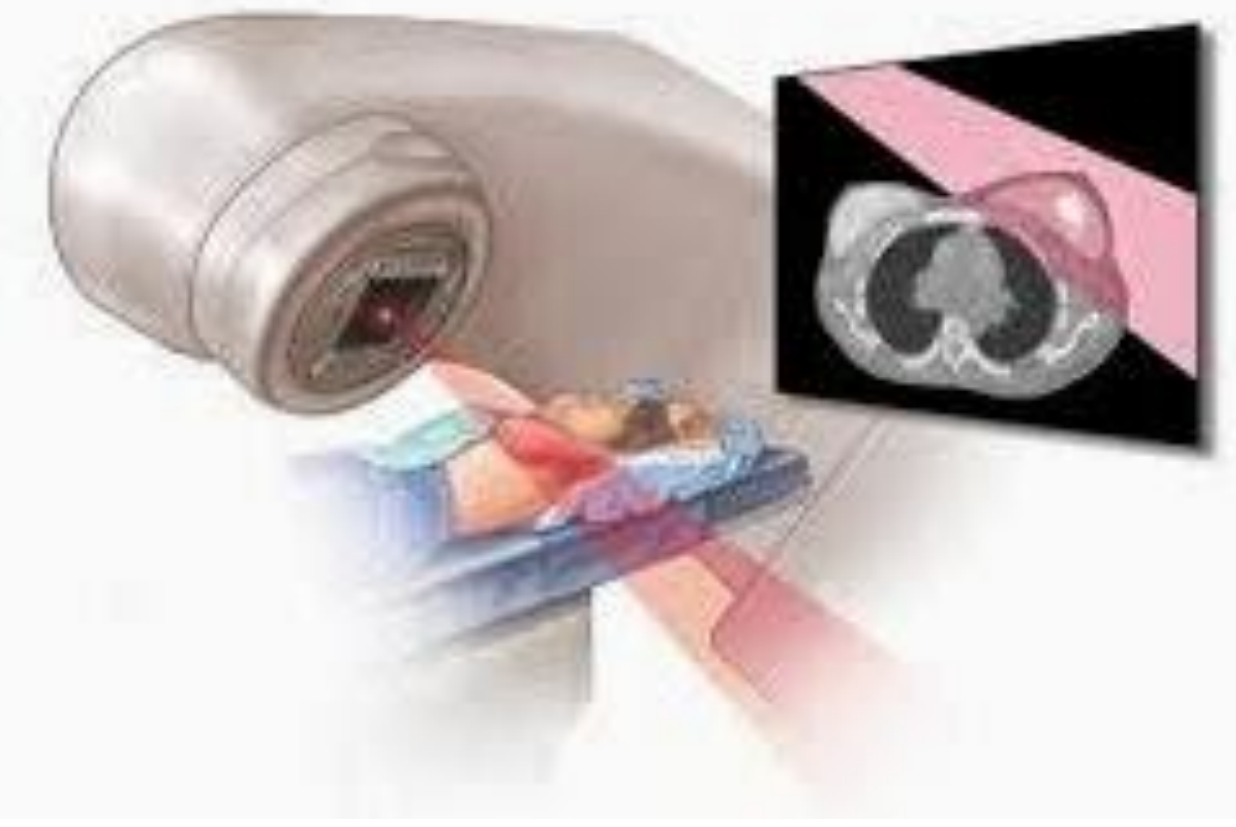




# Nurse-Led initiative: Standardization of Follow-up for Breast Cancer Patients Receiving Radiotherapy



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## Introduction

The Division of Radiation Oncology (DRO) at National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) is the largest radiotherapy (RT) facility in the country, and consistently utilises new treatment regimens to deliver the best therapy to patients. There was, however, **a lack of standardization of post RT follow-up** in terms of assessing of patients' coping and the duration of doctor's appointment. Patient receiving the Fast-Forward(FF) RT regimen, were given earlier and more frequent doctor's appointments, based on the assumption of increased, earlier side effects. Assessment of coping, in addition, was done on an ad hoc basis.

## Problem

No standardized post RT follow-up appointment was provided to patients who underwent breast RT.

## Aim

- **To standardize RT follow-up** in terms of assessing patients' coping, through implementation of a nurse-led follow up telephone call service.
- **To review the need** for doctors' post-RT appointments earlier than the routine 4-6 weeks.

## Method

The nurse-led follow-up telephone call service was implemented on breast cancer patients who completed RT across different RT regimens from May to July 2023. Nurses in DRO conducted follow-up telephone calls between the 7-10 days post RT, using a standardized questionnaire, to assess coping and side effects, as well as provide advice and reminder to patient to seek help via NCCS helpline if they experience further RT side effects before their doctor's appointment.

• Patient had RT to breast

FFRT or 3D 15# or VMAT

• Between 7<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> days Post RT

DRO Nurses Conducted Telephone Follow – Up Calls

• Questionnaires used during calls

Questionnaire to assess for side effects, any assistance needed in managing side effects, usefulness of call

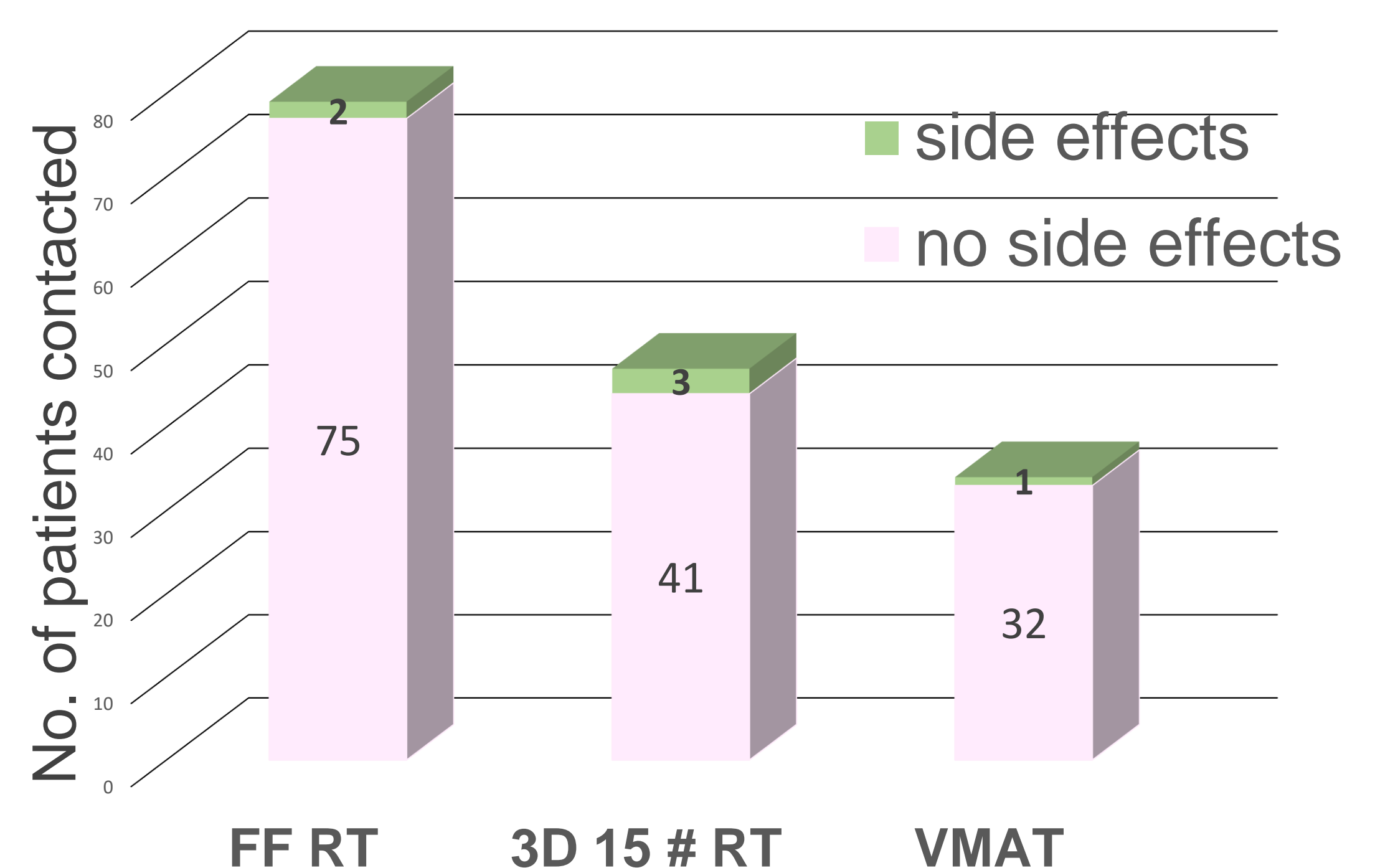
## Questionnaires:

- Q1: How are you coping after finishing your radiation treatment?
- Q2: How are you coping with your side effects after finishing radiation treatment?
- Q3: How is your skin?
- Q4: Have you contacted the hospital because you are not feeling well?
- Q5: Do you need any dressing supplies for your side effects?
- Q6: Are you aware of your follow-up appointment with your radiation oncologist?
- Q7: Are you aware that you can contact the hospital with any concerns regarding your radiation treatment?
- Q8: Do you think this call is helpful and necessary?

## Results

A total of **154** patients were contacted. Most patients (**n=148, 96.1%**) reported they were coping well during the follow-up call. For side effects, only 6 respondents (**3.9%**) reported RT-related side effects, these were distributed rather evenly across different regimens. (2 (2.6%) in the FFRT group vs 3 (6.8%) in the 3D #15 RT group vs. 1(3%) in the VMAT group.) Majority of patients (**n=144, 93.5%**) deemed the follow-up calls helpful and are aware that they could contact NCCS for further side effects concerns.

7 to 10 Days Post breast RT



Side-effects Reported

FF	3D 15#	VMAT
Nipple discharge, query infection	G2 wet desquamation axilla (3F)	G2 wet desquamation under breast
Nipple pain (2), G1 erythema	G2 wet desquamation under breast	
	G2 wet desquamation axilla (3F), itch	

## Conclusion

The nurse-led follow-up telephone call service provided an effective means of assessing patients' immediate post-RT coping and empowered patients to actively track and seek help for RT related side effects. The low percentage of early RT-related side effects across all breast regimens at the follow-up call implied the potential of standardizing doctor's appointments to a timing that is later than 2 weeks. This could reduce clinic visit frequency and save cost for patients while optimizing clinic resources. Further profiling of patients' side effects is required to determine the optimal duration for follow-up.