NOTE: This is the first of a series of reports on the impacts of COVID disease on the practice of oncology as observed through de-identified CancerLinQ data. For more information on CancerLinQ, please see our website https://cancerlinq.org/. For feedback or questions, please contact info@cancerlinq.org.

Every day, the news has new reports of changes in the delivery of health care. At CancerLinQ, a learning health system developed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology, we receive near-real time updates from the Electronic Health Records (EHRs) at our subscribing practices. As a result, we can observe the impact of the pandemic on patterns of cancer care to help practices understand the ramifications of COVID and improve the quality of their care under these unusual circumstances. This week, we are looking at two key indicators – telemedicine encounters and patterns of prescribing for several Immune Checkpoint Inhibitors.

Figure 1 shows telemedicine encounters in active CancerLinQ practices, that is practices for which we have regular updates at the time of the analysis. Although there is some degree of latency in CancerLinQ data, it is clear that the number of telemedicine visits is increasing sharply. While telemedicine visits remain a small number compared to in-person visits, they have gone from being extremely marginal to 1-2% of total encounters. Our data also indicate a substantial decline in the number of in-person visits. Time will tell whether this trend continues and, if so, what its impact might be on patient care and practice resources.
Given the increase in telemedicine visits and the decrease in in-person visits, we decided to examine the use of infused therapies, particularly Immune Checkpoint Inhibitors (ICIs), therapies that are used in advanced disease and have no obvious non-infused alternatives. Figure 2 shows the number of active patients with an order/administration event for several ICIs by week. Generally, we are seeing little change in the total number of administration/orders for these drugs from the previous year.

Figure 2: Number drug orders for Immune Checkpoint Inhibitors by week at active CancerLinQ sites (blue = 2019, orange = 2020).