

Life expectancy prolonged for esophageal cancer patients

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For those with esophageal cancer, initial staging of the disease is of particular importance as it determines whether to opt for a curative treatment or palliative treatment. Research presented in the June issue of *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine* shows that physicians using positron emission tomography (PET)/computed tomography (CT) can discern incremental staging information about the cancer, which can significantly impact management plans.

In 2012, an estimated 17,500 people will be diagnosed with [esophageal cancer](#) and 15,000 will die from the disease. The five-year survival rate for those diagnosed with esophageal cancer without any nodal involvement is 38 percent. However, more than 50 percent of patients have inoperable or [metastatic disease](#) when they are initially diagnosed. The five-year survival rate for these individuals ranges from 3.1 to 18.4 percent.

"The superior accuracy of PET/CT compared to conventional staging investigations such as CT allows clinicians to more appropriately choose and more appropriately plan patient therapy. Our data also show that when PET/CT changes management, it does so correctly in almost all cases," said Thomas Barber, lead author of the study "[18F-FDG PET/CT Has a High Impact on Patient Management and Provides Powerful Prognostic Stratification in the Primary Staging of Esophageal Cancer: A Prospective Study with Mature Survival Data.](#)"

The study followed 139 patients with newly diagnosed esophageal cancer

between July 2002 and June 2005. Each of the patients underwent conventional staging investigations of CT and/or endoscopic ultrasound, followed by PET/CT. When staging information from the conventional staging investigations differed from the PET/CT information, results were validated by pathologic/intraoperative findings or serial imaging and clinical follow up. The impact on patient management plans was measured by comparing pre-PET/CT plans with post-PET/CT plans. [Survival rates](#) of patients were also recorded after five years.

Results of the study show that information gathered from imaging with PET/CT changed the stage group for 59 of the patients (40 percent) and the management plan for 47 of the patients (34 percent). Of the 47 patients who had a change in their management plan, imaging results were validated in 31 patients, and PET/CT correctly changed management in 26 (84 percent) of these. The five-year survival rate for patients with stage IIB-III disease was 38 percent, which is significantly higher than results previously reported (9-34 percent in stage IIB and 6-16 percent in stage III).

"These results demonstrate the power of metabolic imaging with FDG PET/CT when staging esophageal cancer," Barber noted. "Our results demonstrate that this technique should be incorporated into routine clinical practice."

More information: "18F-FDG PET/CT Has a High Impact on Patient Management and Provides Powerful Prognostic Stratification in the Primary Staging of Esophageal Cancer: A Prospective Study with Mature Survival Data" *Journal of Nuclear Medicine*

Provided by Society of Nuclear Medicine

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