

# Danish health care fast track program reduces cancer patients' treatment, diagnosis wait time

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In Denmark, implementing a national fast track system for cancer patients reduced the waiting time between a patient's initial meeting with a health care provider and their first treatment by four weeks when comparing 2010 to 2002, according to a study presented at the Multidisciplinary Head and Neck Cancer Symposium.

Denmark's health care system is state run, meaning [health care services](#) are funded by taxes with no out-of-pocket costs to patients. Many similar health care systems in western counties are plagued by long waiting times for surgery and [radiation therapy](#), which can lead to significant tumor progression for [head and neck cancer](#) patients and as a result an increased risk of local recurrence and death.

In 2008, a new fast track program was implemented, where cancer patients and potential cancer patients were given the highest priority in the Danish health care system. Also, telephone hotlines, reserved slots in ENT and radiology, faster pathology reporting, and twice weekly multidisciplinary tumor boards and clinics were implemented and paper referrals eliminated to curb the increasing wait times.

Researchers from the Danish Head and Neck Cancer Group (DAHANCA) compared data from 474 patients treated in 2002 or 2010, before and after the fast track program, respectively. The median treatment time from first contact with [health care provider](#) to initial

treatment was 41 days in 2010, reduced significantly from 69 days in 2002.

"Although it is still too early to tell if the shorter waiting period has a significant effect on tumor control or survival, our study shows that the treatment waiting period can be significantly reduced by prioritizing cancer patients and that most patient and [health care professionals](#) are satisfied with the fast track system," Cai Grau, MD, DMSc, lead author of the study and a professor of [radiation oncology](#) at Aarhus University Hospital in Aarhus, Denmark, said. "This reduced waiting period will more than likely lead to a decrease in tumor progression and lower a patient's risk of local recurrence and death, which ultimately will reduce the government's costs for treating a cancer patient."

**More information:** The abstract, "Significant reduction in waiting time for diagnosis and treatment of head and neck cancer in Denmark in 2010 compared to 2002. First results of the Danish national fast track program for cancer," will be presented on Friday, January 27, 2012.

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