

Study links mental health problems to poor prognosis in male cancer patients

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A composite artwork illustrating pain and disturbance. Credit: Chris Nurse, Wellcome Images.

Men suffering from psychiatric problems when diagnosed with cancer are more likely to die from the disease, according to a new study part-funded by the Wellcome Trust. The findings also reveal that those with psychiatric illness are likely to be older when they are diagnosed with cancer, possibly indicating a delay in diagnosis.

Scientists from UCL (University College London), the University of Southampton and the Karolinska Institute in Sweden looked at 16 498 men with [cancer](#), including 941 who had been admitted to hospital with mental illness before their cancer [diagnosis](#). The team found that within a year of a cancer diagnosis, around 23 per cent of men with mental illness had died, compared with just under nine per cent of men without.

UCL's Dr David Batty, one of the study authors, said: "Our findings show that men with mental illness at the time they are diagnosed with

cancer are less likely to survive the disease than men who have no history of psychiatric disorders. There may be many reasons for this: those with mental illness may be more likely to have other illnesses, they may be less likely to comply with cancer treatment, and they may be more likely to be obese and to smoke.

"But what's interesting about our research is that it suggests one of the key reasons could be delays in diagnosing men with mental illness with cancer. And this could be because men with mental illness tend to have more contact with psychiatric staff who may be less skilled at recognising cancer symptoms. It may also be that their cancer symptoms are put down to their mental illness and not picked up as quickly as they could be."

Martin Ledwick, head information nurse at Cancer Research UK, said: "This new study gives an interesting insight into what other factors can affect cancer survival. The researchers show that relatives and doctors looking after men who suffer from [mental illness](#) should keep an eye out for possible cancer symptoms. And, for those with cancer, it's important that doctors and carers think about any extra care that these men may need."

The study is published this week in the *British Journal of Cancer*.

More information: Batty GD et al. [Impact of mental health problems on case fatality in male cancer patients](#). *Brit J Cancer* 2012;106:1842-5.

Provided by Wellcome Trust

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