

Have no fear: Most cases of thyroid cancer do not affect survival

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Research presented at the Society of Nuclear Medicine's 59th Annual Meeting reveals that patients with differentiated thyroid cancer live as long as people in perfect health, unless they are in the minority and have reached the most advanced stages of disease. Survival did not vary based on age, sex, or even if patients' cancer had reached the beginning of stage IV.

"This highlights the excellent diagnostic and therapeutic strategies available to patients with differentiated thyroid cancer," says Alexis Vrachimis, M.D., lead investigator for the department of nuclear medicine at University Hospital Muenster, Germany. "The excellent survival rates of almost all of our patients are predominantly due to the multidisciplinary optimization of their diagnostic and therapeutic management, including advanced molecular imaging techniques, highly sensitive laboratory assays, excellent endocrine surgery, individualized high-dose radioiodine therapy and lifelong medical surveillance."

The thyroid is an endocrine gland that produces [thyroid hormones](#), which increase rates of [cellular metabolism](#) and [protein synthesis](#) as well as activity in the [sympathetic nervous system](#) that controls the fight-or-flight response. The U.S. [National Cancer Institute](#) estimates that 56,460 Americans will be diagnosed and 1,780 people expected to die of thyroid cancer in 2012. There are different classifications for thyroid cancer, but most cases are considered differentiated, a term given to two forms called papillary and follicular thyroid cancer. There are four stages of the disease increasing from stages I through IV. The last stage includes

subtypes a, b and c, however, stage IVb is extremely rare, and as such, no patients with this subtype were included in the study.

Investigators analyzed 1,502 consecutive patients with differentiated thyroid cancer who had been treated with radioiodine therapy. Only those patients with stage IVc differentiated thyroid cancer were found to have lower chance of survival than the normal population. This evidence should allay the fears of patients diagnosed with the disease.

"With these survival rates, patients with differentiated thyroid cancer in stages I-IVa could even be considered healthy patients," says Vrachimis.

Provided by Society of Nuclear Medicine

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