

Cancer survival in Germany after the fall of the Iron Curtain

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Data from the 1970s and 1980s show that people affected by cancer survived significantly longer in West Germany than cancer patients behind the Iron Curtain. Looking at a diagnosis period from 1984 to 1985 in the former German Democratic Republic, 28 percent of colorectal cancer patients, 46 percent of prostate cancer patients, and 52 percent of breast cancer patients survived the first five years after diagnosis. By contrast, 5-year survival rates for people in West Germany affected by these types of cancer were 44 percent, 68 percent, and 68 percent in the years from 1979 to 1983 already.

Led by Dr. Lina Jansen and Prof. Hermann Brenner from the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), a team of scientists from DKFZ and the Association of Population-based Cancer Registries in Germany (GEKID) has now studied for the first time how survival rates developed in Germany in the second decade after Germany's reunification. The new study is based on over one million cancer cases from Germany's eleven population-based state cancer registries, which covered approximately 40 percent of the German population in the period studied.

The group analyzed cancer survival rates in the years from 2002 to 2006. They found that 5-year survival rates for 20 out of 25 [cancer types](#) differed by less than three percent between East and West and may therefore be regarded as almost identical.

Only for cancers of the [oral cavity](#), the esophagus and the [gall bladder](#) as

well as for melanoma, cancer patients in former West German states had statistically significantly higher 5-year survival rates. On the other hand, people living in the former East German states had a slight [survival advantage](#) for leukemias.

"The fact that cancer survival rates have aligned in the former West and East German states demonstrates that the standardized health system has created comparable health chances for people in the East and in the West. The dramatic differences in cancer survival rates have almost entirely disappeared, even though economic conditions continue to be different," says Hermann Brenner. "However, it makes more sense now to compare socio-economic differences within individual regions than to think in those obsolete categories of East and West."

More information: *European Journal of Epidemiology* 2012, [DOI: 10.1007/s10654-012-9723-5](#)

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