

Cure for young acute myeloid leukaemia patients increases six-fold since 1970s

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Almost half of teens and young adults with acute myeloid leukaemia (AML) – a typically aggressive form of leukaemia – are cured thanks to improvements in treatment and care, according to research published in the *British Journal of Haematology*.

The research, led by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and co-funded by Cancer Research UK and the Laura Crane Youth Cancer Trust, estimates the 'cure rate' for 15-24 year olds diagnosed in 2006 at 48 per cent – six times the rate in 1975, which was then just eight per cent.

Similarly large improvements are estimated for [older patients](#), right through to those in their 50s. But older patients today still have poor survival – only 13 per cent of patients diagnosed in 2006 aged 60-69 are

predicted to be cured, and this drops to less than five per cent of those aged 70 and over.

In the study, cure is defined as the proportion of a group of cancer survivors for whom life expectancy is similar to that of the general population, given their age and sex. But the treatment may still have long term side effects.

The brighter outlook for young people is because these patients tend to have AML types which are easier to treat with chemotherapy. Younger people can also generally be given more intense treatment, and the short-term side effects can now be managed effectively. Clinical trials are vital in allowing access to new experimental treatments, but recruitment rates could be improved.

Lead author, Dr Anjali Shah, research scientist at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and the University of Oxford, said: "The good news is that nearly half of young adults with AML are cured of their disease, and that cure rate has increased for patients of all ages in England.

"Our study suggests that the main reason for these improvements is the development of new treatments, combined with good levels of recruitment to UK clinical trials. These key issues have been effective in curing more people of AML. But levels of cure of this disease in England remain lower than those observed in other European countries, such as Sweden. The reasons for these differences are unknown."

Pam Thornes, trust manager at the Laura Crane Youth Cancer Trust, said: "It's reassuring to see from the study that cure rates in young people with specific cancers are far greater than they were 30 years ago. This is testament to the research, which charities such as the Laura Crane Youth Cancer Trust are helping to fund, to better understand cancer, which has

led to the advancement in cancer care and treatment."

"Young people with cancer often get overlooked and usually get treated as a child or an adult, which in many cases isn't tailored to their age-specific needs."

In the UK, around 2,500 people are diagnosed with AML each year. The risk of developing AML increases with age and it is most common in people over 65 years old.

Professor Peter Johnson, Cancer Research UK's chief clinician, said: "We've made great progress for younger people with AML in the last 30 years thanks to our clinical trials.

"Things are still very difficult for older patients and the cure rate for them is still low. This is why we're funding more important trials to improve treatments for these groups, to save more lives and to reduce the long-term side effects of treatment."

More information: Shah A., Andersson T.M.L., Racht B., Björkholm M. & Lambert P.C. (2013). Survival and cure of acute myeloid leukaemia in England, 1971-2006: a population-based study, *British Journal of Haematology*. [DOI: 10.1111/bjh.12425](https://doi.org/10.1111/bjh.12425)

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