

NHS cancer treatment improves – but more needs to be done

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New NHS [figures](#) show that, despite improvements, there are still significant differences in outcomes for cancer patients when it comes to age and socio-economic background.

The National Audit Office (NAO) analysis found that 20,000 [cancer](#) deaths could have been avoided if mortality figures for the most deprived groups of people matched the least deprived.

Age was also a factor as patients aged 55 to 64 were found to be 20 per cent more likely to survive for at least one year after diagnosis than those aged 75 to 99 – a variation that the NAO says cannot be put down solely to people being frailer in old age.

According to the report, the number of NHS Trusts and Foundation Trusts breaching the 62-day cancer referral standard set by the UK Government has doubled in one year.

Targets for England state that 85 per cent of patients should be treated within 62 days of being referred by their GP.

Amyas Morse, head of the NAO, said that while there will always be variations in outcomes, the significant variations highlight room for improvement.

However, the data also shows that the NHS has improved its cancer services since 2010.

According to the report, outcomes for [cancer patients](#) have improved, with the percentage of people surviving for one year and five years after diagnosis up to 69 per cent (for those diagnosed in 2012) and 49 per cent (for those diagnosed in 2008) respectively.

But five-year survival remains around 10 per cent below the European average.

Sarah Woolnough, Cancer Research UK's executive director of policy, said: "Cancer survival is improving, but this report provides further evidence that services are not meeting the needs of all patients, and Cancer Research UK is projecting an increase of a third in the number of cases over the next 15 years.

"It's vital that we set fresh ambitions for the future of these services if we are to improve the outlook for the thousands of patients diagnosed with cancer every week."

The figures also showed that one in five cases of cancer were diagnosed through emergency routes between July and December 2012.

"We must do better for patients, especially to tackle the significant variation in patients getting the cancer services they need. Too many patients are still diagnosed through emergency routes and older cancer patients are much less likely to have surgery than younger people," Woolnough said.

"Improving early diagnosis and access to the best treatments has to be a priority," she added.

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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