

Lack of referrals for suspected cancer leads to more deaths

October 13 2015

***Table. The association between urgent referral and death was consistent for the main types of cancer.

Group	Patients	%	Deaths	HR	95% CI	
High referral ratio and high detection rate	34,758	16	14,355	0.95	0.94	0.97
Average	121,692	57	51,533	1.00		
Low referral ratio and low or intermediate detection rate.	58,834	27	25,732	1.07	1.05	1.08
p-trend				Less than 0.001		

Hazard ratios adjusted for age, sex and cancer type.

The association between urgent referral and death was consistent for the main types of cancer. Credit: Cancer Research UK

Deaths are higher in cancer patients whose GPs do not regularly send patients through the two-week urgent referral route for suspected cancer, according to a Cancer Research UK and National Institute for Health Research-funded study.

The research - published today (Wednesday) in the *British Medical*

Journal - examined data from 215,284 English cancer patients. Researchers from King's College London found a clear link between the chance a patient would die, and the likelihood of their GP practice to refer cancer patients to a specialist using the two-week urgent referral route.

Death rates increased by seven per cent in patients from practices which used the two-week urgent referral route least often compared with practices with a typical referral rate.

The urgent two-week referral pathway for patients with suspected cancer was created in England in the early 2000s. The frequency with which GPs use the service varies across England. And the impact on cancer survival of referring cancer patients to specialists via this route has not been previously measured.

Lead author Professor Henrik Moller, epidemiologist at King's College London, said: "This study shows the first link between using the urgent referral route and deaths in cancer patients.

"Increasing a GP's cancer awareness and their likelihood of urgently referring cancer patients could help reduce deaths. There's a fine line to tread between using the urgent referral route regularly and using it too much - which the NHS isn't equipped to respond to. But if GP practices which use the two-week route rarely, were to use it more often, this could reduce deaths of [cancer patients](#)."

Sara Hiom, Cancer Research UK's director of early diagnosis, said.

"This crucial evidence shows that the earlier a cancer patient is diagnosed the better the chances of survival. Earlier cancer can be treated more effectively with a wider range of treatment options. And tumours can progress if there's a delay in time to diagnosis and starting treatment.

"It's never been clearer that reducing late diagnosis saves lives and this research adds to our understanding of what can be done about it. Cancer Research UK is committed to investing in early diagnosis research to support GPs refer suspected [cancer](#) as early as practically possible."

Provided by Cancer Research UK

Citation: Lack of referrals for suspected cancer leads to more deaths (2015, October 13)
retrieved 10 April 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-10-lack-referrals-cancer-deaths.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--