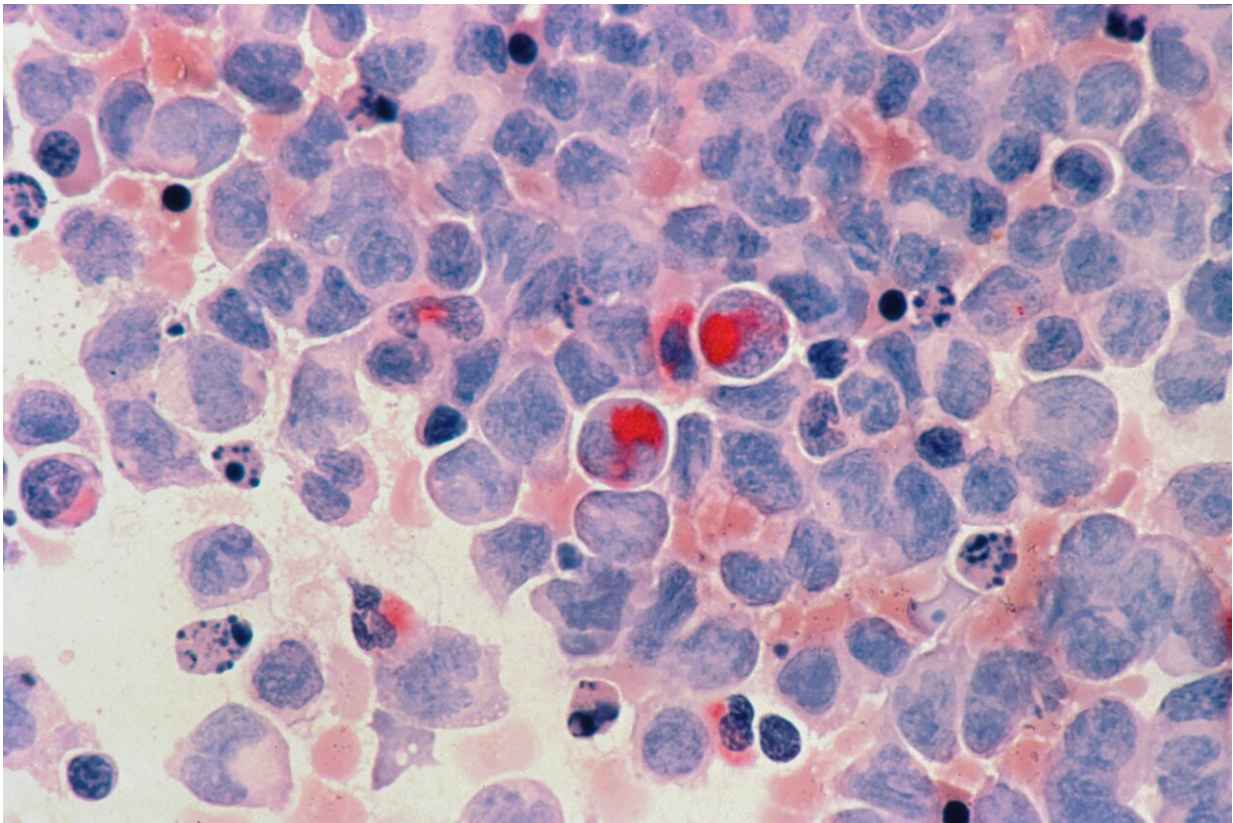


# Patients in lower-income countries receive less timely cancer diagnoses

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The time it takes a cancer patient to see a doctor, receive a diagnosis and begin treatment can vary greatly depending on the patient's location and the type of cancer, with individuals in lower-income countries taking up

to four times longer to initiate care. Dafina Petrova of the Biomedical Research Institute IBS, GRANADA and CIBER of Epidemiology and Public Health in Spain and colleagues report these findings October 20<sup>th</sup> in *PLOS Medicine*.

Cancer is a leading cause of death globally and timely diagnosis and treatment are essential for improving patient outcomes. To understand how the timing of [cancer](#) treatment varies across different cancer types and in high- and lower-income countries, researchers reviewed the relevant scientific literature and performed a meta-analysis of 410 articles representing 68 countries and more than 5.5 million patients.

Specifically, they looked at three time intervals: from the first symptoms to visiting a doctor, from the first consultation to diagnosis, and from diagnosis to the start of treatment. In high-income countries, most patients saw a doctor within a month of experiencing symptoms, but in lower-income countries this interval was 1.5 to 4 times longer for almost all cancer types.

Across all countries, cancers that caused non-specific symptoms, such as myeloma, colorectal, and gynecological cancer, typically took the longest to diagnose, with prostate and gynecological cancers having the longest treatment delays, on average.

The new study highlights the extent of the global disparities in early cancer diagnosis and treatment. The researchers urge that efforts should be made to reduce the amount of time it takes patients in lower-income countries to receive care after experiencing symptoms. They acknowledge that their estimates for the time it takes to diagnose and start treatment mostly came from high-income countries because these [countries](#) have robust health information systems in place to record this information.

Additionally, these findings spotlight types of cancers where research on ways to provide earlier diagnosis and treatment may yield better outcomes for patients.

Petrova adds, "Our new study identifies the cancers where diagnosis and treatment initiation may take the longest and reveals important global disparities in early cancer [diagnosis](#) and treatment."

**More information:** The patient, diagnostic, and treatment intervals in adult patients with cancer from high- and lower-income countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis, *PLoS Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1004110](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1004110)

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