

Cancer patients diagnosed early are more likely to avoid chemotherapy

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Credit: Cancer Research UK

Cancer patients are around five times more likely to have surgery to remove their tumour, and less likely to have chemotherapy, if they are diagnosed at the earliest stage compared to the latest stage, according to new figures.

This is the first time researchers have been able to show whether NHS

patients received [surgery](#), [chemotherapy](#) and radiotherapy, alone or in combination, linked with their cancer stage.

Chemotherapy and radiotherapy are the most appropriate first line treatments for some cancers, but for most types of the disease surgery to remove a tumour is the most likely way to cure it. Treating a tumour with surgery alone often minimises longer term side effects which can affect a patient's quality of life.

Cancer Research UK and Public Health England examined data from about half a million patients with 22 different cancer types in England between 2013-2014. It shows that seven in 10 (70 percent) diagnosed at the earliest stage (stage 1) had surgery to remove their tumour. This falls to around one in 10 (13 percent) of those diagnosed at the latest stage (stage 4).

Around one in 10 (12 percent) patients diagnosed at the earliest stage have chemotherapy. This rises to around four in 10 (39 percent) of those diagnosed at the latest stage.

Prof Mick Peake, a lead clinician in the study and based at Public Health England, said: "Doctors want to offer patients the best possible treatment. For some cancers, like leukaemia and lymphoma, that's chemotherapy. But in most cases the earlier cancer is diagnosed the more likely it is to be effectively treated by surgery, and that means chemotherapy isn't always necessary.

"In general, the treatment of cancers at an early stage also reduces the risk of long term side effects which can affect patients' quality of life."

Cancer Type	Stage	Surgery	Chemotherapy	Radiotherapy
All cancers	All stages	44.8%	28.4%	27.3%
	Earliest stage (stage 1)	69.7%	12.4%	28.4%
	Latest stage (stage 4)	12.9%	38.7%	25.4%
Breast	All stages	81.2%	34.4%	63.2%
	Earliest stage (stage 1)	92.8%	17.0%	70.2%
	Latest stage (stage 4)	25.1%	44.8%	39.2%
Colon (bowel)	All stages	65.7%	31.2%	3.4%
	Earliest stage (stage 1)	93.5%	2.7%	1.2%
	Latest stage (stage 4)	31.5%	47.3%	5.6%
Non-small cell lung cancer	All stages	15.6%	25.2%	27.5%
	Earliest stage (stage 1)	53.4%	5.6%	20.4%
	Latest stage (stage 4)	1.5%	29.7%	29.4%

Table shows the percentage of cancer patients that received surgery, chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy, alone or in combination, for patients diagnosed with the three most common cancers. Credit: Cancer Research UK

For the most common type of bowel cancer, colon cancer, more than nine in 10 patients (94 percent) have surgery to remove their tumour

when diagnosed at the earliest stage, when radiotherapy and chemotherapy are not usually necessary.

For patients diagnosed with stage 4 disease around three in 10 (32 percent) have surgery and those who do will often have chemotherapy as well.

Less than one in 20 colon cancer patients with the earliest stage disease have chemotherapy compared to nearly five in 10 (47 percent) diagnosed at the latest stage.

In breast cancer, almost 95 percent of patients diagnosed at the earliest stage and 25 percent of those diagnosed at the latest stage have surgery. Those diagnosed at the latest stage are more than twice as likely to have chemotherapy as stage one patients.

For patients with the earliest stage non-small cell lung cancer (the most common type of the disease) 6 percent have chemotherapy. This compares to 30 percent when diagnosis is made at the latest stage.

Sara Hiom, Cancer Research UK's director of early diagnosis, said: "Understandably, people sometimes fear cancer treatments as well as the disease itself. This research shows how important an early diagnosis is for simplifying the treatment options as much as possible. Until now, we've not been able to look at such rich data for the whole of England and analyse who's been treated how. Now, thanks to recent improvements, it's possible to show how stage affects the treatments patients need, giving us a more complete picture.

"We all have our part to play to increase the number of patients diagnosed earlier. People should consult their GP if they are worried about symptoms, GPs should follow clinical guidelines to refer patients, and the right diagnostic tests need to be performed and reported

promptly so that patients can benefit more from treatments. This all needs greater attention and our national cancer strategy helps give this focus."

Dr Jem Rashbass, [cancer](#) lead at Public Health England said: "This data is the most comprehensive of its kind in the world, linking stage of diagnosis and treatment for individual [patients](#). Its wealth of knowledge will help us to better understand treatment and survival patterns and underpins the importance of early diagnosis and screening."

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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