



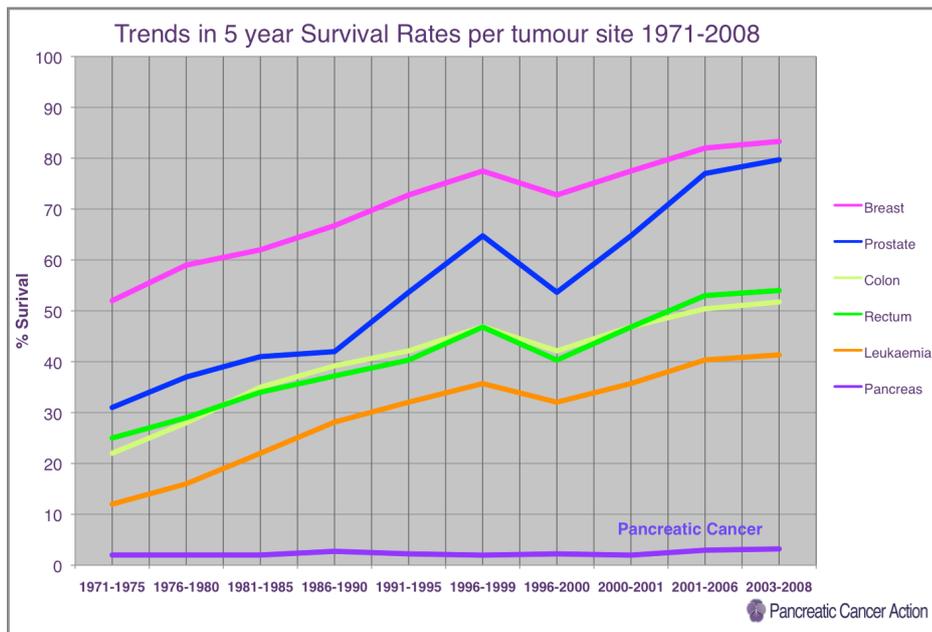
Pancreatic Cancer Action

Changing the Numbers for Pancreatic Cancer
www.pancreaticcanceraction.org

Media Briefing on Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Week November 22nd-28th 2010

Pancreatic cancer is a silent killer. It is difficult to diagnose and when diagnosed, it is often in the advanced stages. Pancreatic cancer is a very aggressive form of cancer that is resistant to current therapies and treatments.

The 2010 Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Week “Early Diagnosis Saves Lives” campaign aims to increase awareness of pancreatic cancer amongst the general public as well primary care clinicians and spotlight the need for speedier referrals to specialists. During the week, pancreatic cancer charities, organisations, pancreatic cancer specialist units and individuals will be holding events to raise awareness of this silent cancer.



Only 3% of pancreatic cancer patients survive 5 years – this number hasn't changed in over 40 years

Pancreatic Cancer is the 5th most common cause of cancer death in the UK yet receives only 1% of overall research funding

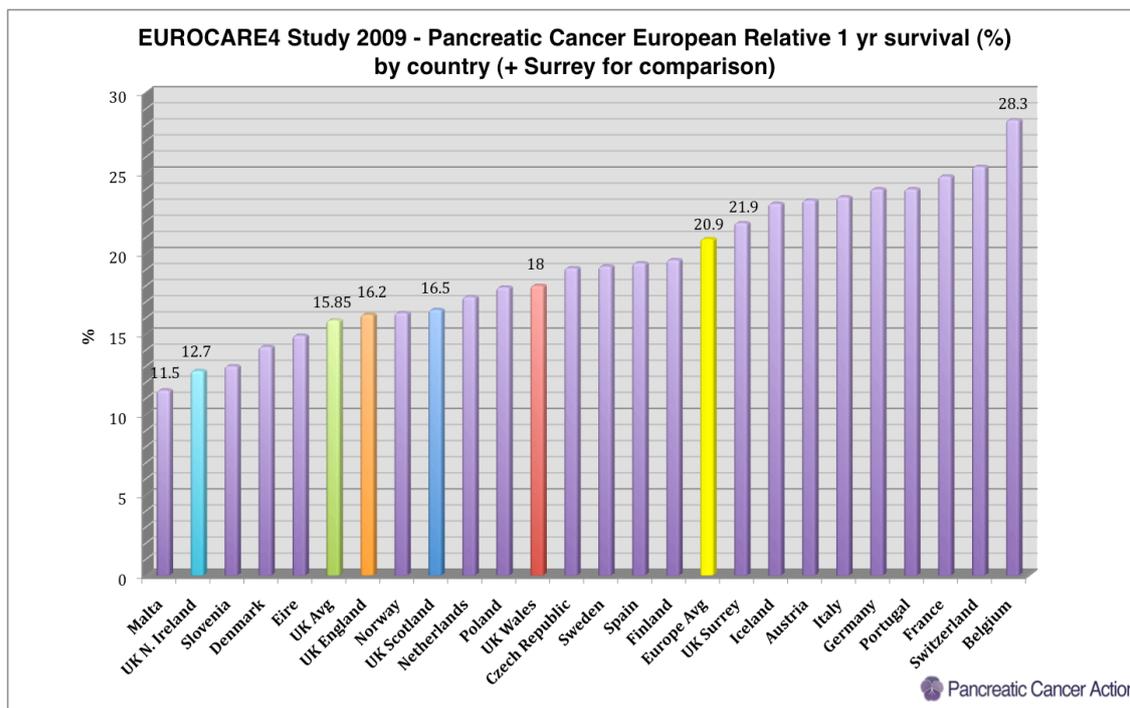
90% of patients are diagnosed too late for potentially curative surgery

Pancreatic cancer is the fifth most common cause of cancer death in the UK. While five-year survival rates of breast cancer and prostate cancer have more than doubled since the 1970s, pancreatic cancer survival rates haven't changed in 40 years. On diagnosis, most pancreatic cancer patients learn that their illness is incurable and that they have an average life expectancy of a mere 3-6 months. As pancreatic cancer is very difficult to diagnose, 90% of patients are referred to specialists too late for potentially curative surgery. Only 3% survive to 5 years.

With just 1% of research funding, research into pancreatic cancer lags well behind programmes for virtually every other cancer and is severely underfunded given its incidence and mortality.

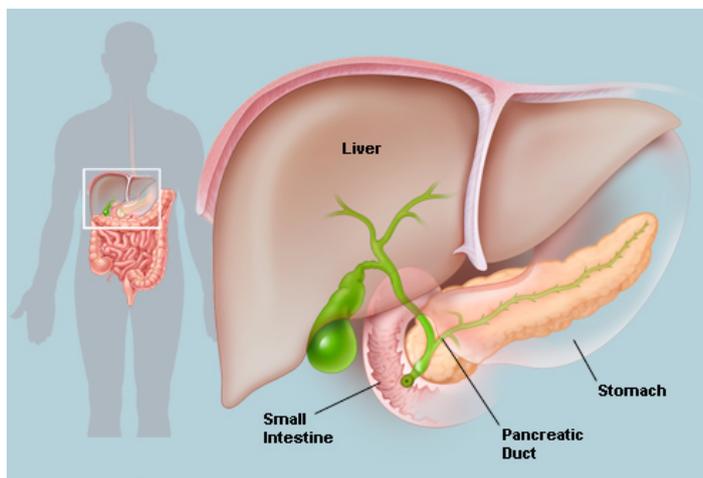


Recent data from the EUROCARE4 Study shows one-year survival for pancreatic cancer in the UK (average) is 15.8% This is way below the European average of 21% (see graph below):



Background Information

What is the pancreas?



The pancreas is a pear-shaped gland located in a deep location in the middle of the abdomen behind the stomach and in front of the spine. The pancreas produces insulin and glucagon, which control blood sugar, helping the body use and store the energy it gets from food. The pancreas also produces digestive enzymes that help digest (break down) food.

It has a wide end (head), a middle portion (body) and a narrow section (tail)

80% of pancreatic cancers occur in the head portion of the gland, less commonly in the body (15%) and tail (5%).

Picture: WebMD LLC <http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/picture-of-the-pancreas>

What is Pancreatic Cancer?

The term pancreatic cancer usually refers to the common pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma. Worldwide there are around 250,000 new cases each year; in Europe that figure is more than 70,000. The numbers deaths and mortality for pancreatic cancer closely reflect the numbers of people being diagnosed. In the UK in 2007, 7684 people were newly diagnosed and in 2008 7781 people died. Pancreatic cancer affects men and women equally with a slight bias towards younger men and older women. **1/3 of all cases occur in those under the age of 65.**

Pancreatic cancer occurs when malignant cells form in the pancreas. The disease progresses rapidly but usually produces vague symptoms in the early stages. Pancreatic cancer is often undetected until it has spread to other areas of the body (metastasized). Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes) weight loss and abdominal pain can be the first signs of the disease.

There are two types of pancreatic cancer:

By far the commonest type of pancreatic cancer arises from the cells that line ducts in the pancreas that carry the digestive fluids from the gland into the intestine. This type is called a ductal adenocarcinoma. Approximately 10% arise from the valve where the gland enters the intestine (ampullary adenocarcinoma). There are others less common tumours that arise from the cells in the pancreas that normally produce hormones (islet cell or endocrine tumours).

The causes of pancreatic cancer are not known. However, major risk factors include smoking, obesity, diabetes and hereditary conditions associated with predisposition to cancer. Patients whose immediate family members have had pancreatic cancer have a risk factor up to two times higher than the normal population.

What are the symptoms of pancreatic cancer?

Pancreatic cancer is sometimes called a “silent cancer” because the symptoms are generally non specific and vague.

Classical symptoms include:

- Painless jaundice (yellow skin/eyes, dark urine) related to bile duct obstruction
- Significant and unexplained weight loss;
- New onset of significant abdominal pain;

Other common symptoms :

- pain in the upper abdomen that typically radiates to the back and is relieved by leaning forward (seen in carcinoma in the body or tail of the pancreas);
- vague dyspepsia or abdominal discomfort;
- loss of appetite, or nausea and vomiting;
- pain when eating;
- steatorrhoea (fatty stools that are often pale and smelly);
- New onset diabetes

All of these symptoms can have multiple other causes, and there is not yet a reliable and easy diagnostic screening test for pancreatic cancer. For many patients and doctors, considering pancreatic cancer as a possible diagnosis occurs late, often after several appointments and tests for other conditions, Therefore, pancreatic cancer is often not diagnosed until it is advanced.

What treatments are available?

The only potentially curative option is surgery however only 15% of patients are eligible and even then, the median survival following surgery is 18-24months. The 5-year survival for this group ranges from 7-25%.

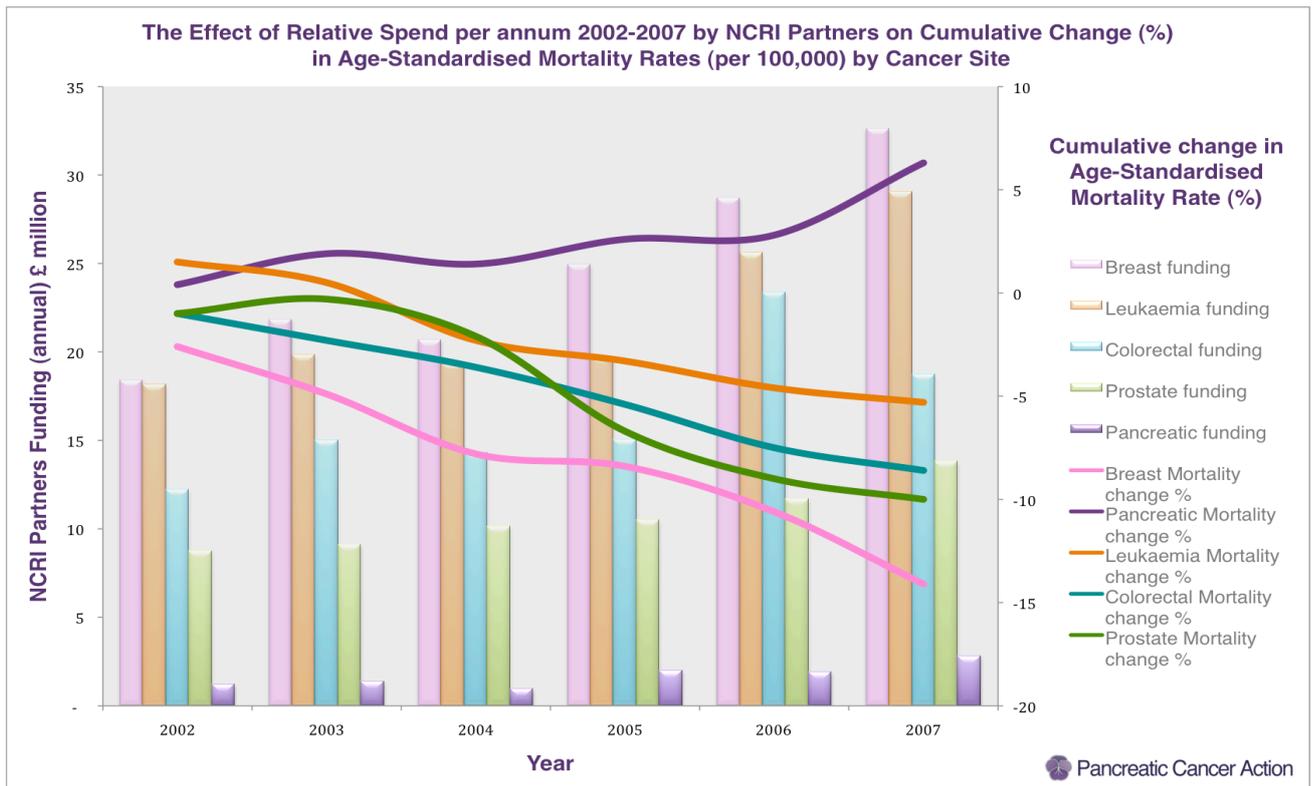
Unfortunately, pancreatic cancer is relatively resistant to current chemotherapy treatments and therapies and most treatment for pancreatic cancer is palliative. Mean life expectancy from diagnosis is a mere 6-12 months.

Funding Inequalities of Pancreatic Cancer

NCRI (National Cancer Research Institute) Partners funding for pancreatic cancer has remained consistently low over the 6 years from 2002-2007 and has never been above £3 million per annum. In 2006, pancreatic cancer received only 0.5% of the site specific NCRI Partners funding (Source: NCRI) This is in spite of the fact there has been an upward trend in the incidence and mortality of pancreatic cancer in the UK over the same period.

In addition, the embryonic pancreatic cancer charitable sector has considerably fewer funds available to donate to research in comparison with other cancers:

According to the Charity Commission, between 2007-2008 the two main breast cancer charities, Breakthrough Breast Cancer and Breast Cancer Care raised nearly £33 million. In 2007, pancreatic cancer charities had raised approx. £550,000 – this can only improve once greater awareness of pancreatic cancer is established.



For Further Information:



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