How many people were living with cancer in 2013?

Authors: James Channon1, Katherine Hanson2, Sam Javeas3, Hannah McConnell4, Joanna Petrich5, Mike Peake3, Sarah Miller6, Douglas Clark3, Eileen Morgan2, Glyn White2, Dyfed Wyn Huws2, Yvian Mat2, Henriek Møller4

Purpose

Macmillan and NCRAS estimated that there were 2.27 million people living with cancer in the UK at the end of 2013. As part of the Macmillan-NCRAS UK Cancer Prevalence Project, we extended this work to incorporate more recent data and to estimate prevalence (the number of people living with cancer in a population at a given point in time) in the UK at the end of 2013.

Methods

Cancer registration data on individuals who were diagnosed with cancer and alive on the 31st December 2013 were extracted from the registration systems for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales by each registry and provided to NCRAS in an anonymised format. Cancer registrations were categorised into female breast, colorectal, lung, prostate and all other cancers (excluding non-melanoma skin cancers). Data on age, sex and year of diagnosis were also used for analysis. A negative binomial regression model was used to estimate the number of people who were still living with cancer at the end of 2013 and who were diagnosed before cancer registries were established in their respective nations.

Complete prevalence is defined as the sum of observed prevalence, from the years of diagnosis that were available in the registry data, and modelled prevalence, from those that were not (Figure 1). We estimated that there were ~2.3 million people living with cancer in the UK at the end of 2013 (57% women and 43% men). This is in line with estimates predicted by Maddams et al (2012)1.

England shows the highest numbers of patients living with cancer, owing to its relatively large population size. Similarly, Northern Ireland has the lowest number, probably due to it having the smallest population size. When adjusted to account for these differing population sizes, the nation with the highest crude prevalence rate per 100,000 people is Wales, with England the lowest. This differs slightly from the work carried out by Maddams et al (2009)1, which showed that Northern Ireland had the lowest crude rates of all four nations. Proportions in Figure 2 do not account for differing age distributions across nations, which could reveal that the older population in Wales is a contributing factor to this trend.

Table 1 presents prevalence numbers broken down by cancer site, focusing on the four most prevalent cancers by incidence (female breast, prostate, lung and colorectal). Lung was the least prevalent (3% of total complete prevalence) reflecting poor prognosis associated with this cancer type. Female breast cancer was the most prevalent (26%) across the whole of the UK, owing partly to a high incidence due to early diagnosis from screening programmes and higher cancer survival as a result of effective cancer treatments. Number of years that have passed since diagnosis varies across cancer sites, with the younger 0-39 age group (14%) reflecting lower incidence and the older 70+ age group (25%) with the older 70+ age group (25%) reflecting lower incidence and the older 70+ age group (25%) with the younger 0-39 age group (14%) reflecting lower incidence and the older 70+ age group (25%)

Conclusions

The complete cancer prevalence figure for the end of 2013 as it was predicted by work done by Maddams et al (2012)1 is shown as a projection that includes estimates for 2012. Our analysis provides a more up-to-date understanding of the UK population of people living with cancer using the latest available data. This has fed into a further work programme aiming to project the cancer prevalence population. This will allow an understanding of the potential future trends associated with people living with cancer in the UK and is important for planning for future distributions of resources in this area.

Acknowledgements

This work is part of the Macmillan Cancer Support and Public Health England’s NCRAS Partnership Work Plan. The data sourced are presented in collaboration with the Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit; the Health Intelligence and Knowledge Management Division; Public Health Wales; the Scottish Cancer Registry; and the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, which is funded by the Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland.

References and notes:


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