

FINAL DRAFT

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THOUSANDS OF OLDER PEOPLE DYING PREMATURELY FROM CANCER, SAY RESEARCHERS

As many as 15,000 people over 75 could be dying prematurely from cancer each year in the UK, according to research presented today at the National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN) conference.

These premature deaths could be prevented if cancer mortality rates in the UK dropped to match countries in Europe and America which have the lowest rates.

The researchers from the North West Cancer Intelligence Service (NWCIS) in Manchester compared cancer death rates in the UK with Europe and America.

They found that over the past decade the numbers of people dying from cancer in the under 75s has significantly dropped in the UK. But, little progress has been made in the over 75s and the gap in death rates with other countries is getting wider.

Dr Tony Moran, lead researcher from NWCIS, said “It’s worrying that so many older people die from cancer in the UK compared with other countries. But, it’s not clear why this is. Research is urgently needed to understand the reasons for the extra deaths so that steps can be taken to prevent them.

“Cancer is largely a disease of older people, with about half of all cancers diagnosed in those aged 70 or older. Most 75 year olds could be expected to live for at least another ten years and we would expect them to benefit from improvements in treatment.”

Chris Carrigan, head of the NCIN, said: “This study indicates that a worrying number of older cancer patients are dying unnecessarily and likely reasons include going to the doctor late, delayed diagnosis and treatment. It’s really important that people are aware of cancer

symptoms and feel able to go to the doctor if they notice anything that feels wrong for them. We believe many deaths could be avoided each year in the UK if cancers were diagnosed sooner."

Professor Mike Richards, National Cancer Director, said: "This is an important study and urgent action needs to be taken on the findings. We need to ensure that cancer patients of all ages are diagnosed as early as possible and receive appropriate treatment.

"The findings have already been shared with the National Cancer Equality Initiative and we will be working with the NHS and other interested parties to tackle any age inequalities."

ENDS

For media enquiries please contact Laura Dibb on 020 7061 8051 or, out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059.

Notes to Editors:

North West Cancer Intelligence Service

The North West Cancer Intelligence Service (NWCIS) collects data from many sources to provide population-based cancer information for the North West of England. This information is used to improve cancer services, and to support research into the prevention and treatment of cancer. It is hosted by The Christie, one of Europe's leading cancer centres based in Manchester.

About the National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN)

- The NCIN was established in June 2008 and its remit is to coordinate the collection, analysis and publication of comparative national statistics on diagnosis, treatment and outcomes for all types of cancer
- As part of the National Cancer Research Institute, the NCIN aims to promote efficient and effective data collection at each stage of the cancer journey
- Patient care will be monitored by the NCIN through expert analyses of up-to-date statistics
- The NCIN will drive improvements in the standards of care and clinical outcomes through exploiting data
- The NCIN will support audit and research programmes by providing cancer information
- The NCIN receives the bulk of its funding through the NHS
- Visit www.ncin.org.uk for more information