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DATA SUGGESTS TOO FEW LUNG CANCER PATIENTS GETTING SURGERY

Only half as many lung cancer patients in England are getting potentially lifesaving surgery compared to the best countries in the world, according to a new report by the National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN).

The report, launched today at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference in Liverpool, looked at all newly diagnosed lung cancer patients in England between 2004-2006 and followed them up for six months after diagnosis using routine NHS data* to see whether they had surgery to treat the disease in an NHS Trust in England.

The findings showed that overall nine per cent of lung cancer patients had surgery** whereas experts suggest in many parts of the world around 20 per cent are being operated on. This could, at least in part, explain why England's five year lung cancer survival lags behind the rest of the world.

These data also show that 14 per cent of men and women aged 50-59 have surgery to treat the disease compared to nine per cent of those aged 70-79. And for the over 80s, the numbers having surgery dropped to just two per cent.

Dr Mick Peake, Consultant Chest Physician at Glenfield Hospital, Leicester and Clinical Lead for the NCIN, said: "These figures show a worryingly low number of people are having surgery for lung cancer in England. We should be matching the best in the world with around 20 per cent of lung cancer patients undergoing surgery.

"Not all lung cancer patients will be eligible for surgery as this depends on the stage of their cancer or whether they have any other diseases. However these data still show that only half compared to the best in the world are having this potentially lifesaving treatment. And this may be a major reason why the long term survival figures for patients with lung cancer in England are not as good as they could be.

“We need to understand why this is happening. Do we need more lung cancer surgeons or are patients simply being diagnosed too late for surgery?”

Professor Sir Mike Richards, National Cancer Director, said: "This study highlights the importance of collecting information on the treatments received by cancer patients across the country. Where there is variation among patients receiving surgery we must look carefully to understand the reasons for this.

"The low rate of lung cancer surgery is likely to be due in part to late diagnosis. We know that earlier diagnosis can save lives, that is why we are launching a new campaign from January to alert people to the early signs and symptoms of lung, bowel and breast cancer. We will publish an updated cancer strategy in the winter setting the future direction for cancer care."

ENDS

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

Notes to editors:

*The analysis used cancer registrations from English cancer registries linked to routinely collected NHS data from Hospital Episode Statistics. Patients diagnosed solely on the basis of a death certificate were excluded from the analysis.

**The analysis included operations classified as major resections; surgical operations that would attempt to remove the tumour for lung cancer patients.

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

About the NCRI Cancer Conference

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference is the UK's major forum for showcasing the best British and international cancer research. The Conference offers unique opportunities for networking and sharing knowledge by bringing together world leading experts from all cancer research disciplines. The sixth annual NCRI Cancer Conference is taking place from the 7-10 November 2010 at the BT Convention Centre in Liverpool. For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference

About the NCRI

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in April 2001. It is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry which promotes co-operation in cancer research among the 21 member organisations for the benefit of patients, the public and the scientific community. For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk

NCRI members are: the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Association for International Cancer Research; Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA, Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; Medical Research Council; Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Research & Development Office); Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; Welsh Assembly Government (Wales Office of Research and Development for Health & Social Care); The Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.