



PANCREATIC CANCER FACT SHEET

Pancreatic cancer facts and funding

1. Each year approximately 7,700 people in the UK are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, split equally between men and women. Worldwide there are around 250,000 new cases each year, in Europe more than 70,000 and in the USA 32,000.
2. Pancreatic cancer is the fifth most common cause of cancer death in the UK, causing 5% of all cancer deaths each year.
3. Pancreatic cancer has the lowest survival rate of all cancers – just 3% of those diagnosed in the UK survive for 5 years.
4. The survival rate for pancreatic cancer has seen no improvement over the last 40 years. It is the only cancer which has seen no improvement in survival during this period.
5. Pancreatic cancer is the cause of 5% of cancer deaths but attracts just 1.6% of all research funding (2007 data). This compares to breast cancer, which is the cause of 7.8% of all cancer deaths and attracts 18.8% of funding. The figures for breast cancer show that sufficient funding for research into a disease can make a major difference in survival rates.
6. Pancreatic cancer is notoriously difficult to diagnose and treat, because it is unusually aggressive, symptoms are often vague and appear at a late stage and surgery is very difficult.

Pancreatic cancer symptoms

1. Pancreatic cancer is sometimes called a 'silent cancer' because there are generally few symptoms in the early stages, and those that are present can be non-specific and vague. Common symptoms can include:
 - painless jaundice (yellow skin/eyes, dark urine) related to bile duct obstruction
 - significant and unexplained weight loss
 - new onset of abdominal discomfort
2. All of these symptoms can have multiple other causes, and there is not yet a reliable diagnostic test for pancreatic cancer

Pancreatic cancer treatment

1. The term pancreatic cancer usually refers to the common pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma, although there is a variety of other tumour types with varying prognoses.
2. About 95% of tumours begin in exocrine cells, which produce the digestive enzymes that help break down food. The endocrine cells in the pancreas produce hormones, such as insulin and glucagon, that help control blood sugar levels.
3. The pancreas is a gland about 6 inches long, shaped like a thin pear lying on its side. The wider end of the pancreas is called the head, the middle section is called the body, and the narrow end is called the tail. Pancreatic cancer usually arises in the head of the pancreas (80%) and less commonly in the body (15%) and tail (5%).
4. By the time of diagnosis, the disease is usually well-advanced in the majority of patients which means they are ineligible for surgery (resection). In these cases, the average survival time between diagnosis and death is 6 – 12 months.
5. If the disease is not well-advanced at diagnosis, surgery is possible to remove the tumour along with part of the pancreas. About 10% of patients diagnosed are eligible for surgery. The average survival following surgery for pancreatic cancer is gradually improving, particularly using combination treatments with chemotherapy, but is still only 20-24 months.
6. Pancreatic cancer has a limited response to traditional chemotherapy, which also explains the poor prognosis for patients diagnosed with the disease.