






PART 2

Provincial Round-up

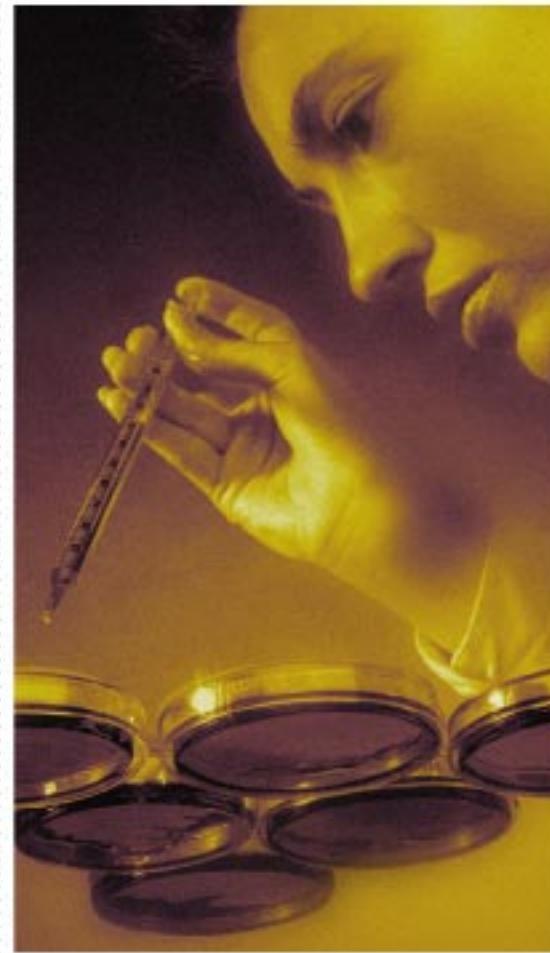
What do we really know about cancer care in Canada?

Cancer Care in Canada approached provincial cancer agencies, registries and Ministries of Health with four questions regarding the state of cancer care in their province. The original goal was to gather and compare key measurements in order to see whether cancer care and cancer outcomes varied in a significant way across the country. Given the state of data collection at a provincial level, meaningful comparisons cannot yet be made. However, the responses provide an interesting view of how much each province knows about the care its residents receive, as well as about the outcomes of care.

1. How many people are currently living with a cancer diagnosis in your province?

 Manitoba	45,305	as of December 31, 1996. Source: Cancer incidence and prevalence in the Manitoba Regional Health Authorities, April 1998, Manitoba Health/Manitoba Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation, p.6.
 British Columbia	107,830	as of end 1998. BC counted all residents who had previously been diagnosed with cancer and were still alive. The BC Cancer Agency further estimates that, of this number, 84,493 people had been cured of their cancer.
 Ontario	202,283	as of December 31, 1996. Ontario counted only these residents diagnosed with cancer after 1987 who were still alive. If a cancer patient had more than one cancer diagnosis during the 10-year period, they were only counted once.
 Nova Scotia	18,300	as of December 31, 1998. This has grown from 9,700 at the end of 1983, reflecting changes in any or all of the following: incidence rates, population size and age, probability of survival after diagnosis, as well as the effectiveness of data collection on cancer cases, and linkage of cases to death notifications.
 Saskatchewan	31,535	as of May 31, 2000. This has grown from 27,142 people in 1985.

While this information would seem important to cancer care system planners who must anticipate resource needs, few provinces actually know this number. The reason is that, even though all provincial cancer registries track new cases of cancer (or new tumours) as well as cancer deaths, they are unable to match the two databases to come up with this prevalence



data. Five provinces were able to provide this data, calculated by determining the number of cases diagnosed over a certain time period and assessing how many of these people were alive at the end of that time period.

2. What are the five-year survival rates for residents of your province diagnosed with breast, prostate, lung and colorectal cancer?

This question runs into the same problem as Question 1: the need to match tumour registries with death registries. Further difficulties include tracking people who are diagnosed in one province and die in another. Provinces with central cancer agencies may stand a better chance of collecting this information, as all patients diagnosed with cancer will be tracked in one system. Officials in Québec and New Brunswick, where there are no central agencies, sounded distinctly less optimistic about matching this data in the near future. "It's dif-

British Columbia five-year survival rates (%)

INVASIVE CANCERS DIAGNOSED	BETWEEN 1981-83	BETWEEN 1991-93
Breast	76	85
Prostate	72	90
Colorectal	54	59
Lung	15	14

Source: BC Cancer Agency

"We can attribute the improvement to treatment improvements, a lesser severity of disease at diagnosis (attributable, in breast and prostate cancer, to screening) and completeness of follow-up information," says Beth Estabrook, Director of the BC Cancer Registry.

icult to rally public support for data collection and analysis," says Michel Beaupré, Director of Québec's Tumour Registry.

A new project at Statistics Canada hopes to provide five-year survival information by province before the end of 2000. They are currently assessing what data is available and are working to fill in the gaps.

However, the ability to draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of care from five-year survival data has recently been called into question by American researchers. They found that "in many cases, better five-year survival rates are due to earlier diagnoses of cancer, not improvements in treatment. And improved five-year survival rates bear little relationship to overall death rates." (Webmd.com/ June 2000) In other words, it could be that people are not living any longer with their

Ontario five-year survival rates (%)

INVASIVE CANCERS DIAGNOSED	BETWEEN 1981-83	BETWEEN 1991-93
Breast	74	82
Prostate	70	86
Colorectal	51	57
Lung	14	16

* Based on Ontario life table analysis of relative survival, with follow-up to December 31, 1997. The figures exclude cases of second and later primaries, cases registered on the basis of a death certificate only and cases under age 15 or over age 89.



COMING SOON IN ONTARIO: A benchmark for wait times to surgery

Cancer Care Ontario's Surgical Oncology Network is now conducting a study to determine average wait times for cancer surgery at the hospitals that are affiliated with Ontario's eight regional cancer centres. Using the study results, the network hopes

to set a benchmark for the maximum time a patient in Ontario should wait for cancer surgery. The study looks at times between the first phone call to the surgeon and the first visit by the patient; the diagnosis of cancer and the staging of the disease; the treatment decision to surgery, to the arrival

of the pathology report; and the beginning of other treatment such as radiation therapy or chemotherapy. Data from this first phase should be available by the end of 2000. A second phase of the study will include community hospitals that provide cancer surgery.

Alberta survival rates (%) (sexes combined, 1985-1998)

PERCENT SURVIVING AFTER DIAGNOSIS	1 YEAR	5 YEARS	10 YEARS	13 YEARS
Breast	96	78	66	62
Prostate	94	72	61	55
Colorectal	78	54	49	49
Lung	38	14	11	09

Source: Alberta Cancer Board

The Alberta Cancer Board provided slightly different data, allowing us to see the relation between 5 and 10 year survival patterns, but not to compare 5-year survival of patients diagnosed ten years apart.

cancer, only that it is detected at an earlier stage. This may point to the need for Canadian statisticians to present longer-term survival patterns before we can draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of care.

3. How long do residents of your province wait for cancer treatment?

Despite the attention waiting times are receiving in the popular press, few provinces have complete information about how many cancer patients are receiving prompt treatment and virtually none of this information can be compared from province to province. Too many variables come into play, according to cancer officials, including the type of tumour, the particular treatment course appropriate for each patient (i.e. some people will receive radiation therapy prior to surgery; others af-

Nova Scotia survival rates (%)

PERCENT SURVIVING	5 YEARS	10 YEARS
Breast	68	49
Prostate	60	33
Colorectal	Men 39 Wom 44	Men 26 Wom 31
Lung	Men 10 Wom 14	Men 4 Wom 8

The Nova Scotia Cancer Registry was able to provide crude survival percentages for cases diagnosed from 1988 to 1998 and followed to the end of 1998.