

# Care provided to cancer patients in their last month of life: a retrospective study in patients who died in Dutch university hospitals

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## Background

A quarter of all patients die in a hospital. Insight into their received care can provide important information.

## Aim

To describe the care provided in the last month of life to patients with cancer who died in an university hospital.

## Methods

A retrospective chart review was conducted within all eight Dutch University Medical Centres. The Dutch Cancer Registry was used to identify 150 deceased patients per centre. Only patients who 1) died in the hospital and 2) due to cancer were selected. Trained data managers derived 38 preselected items from the patient file. Whether a patient was admitted to the hospital during a palliative care trajectory was retrospectively assessed by an oncologist (AR) and a specialized nurse (ML).

## Results

Data of ninety-four patients were included; mean age was 64 years and 63% were men. Most common diagnoses were lung cancer (29%) and gastrointestinal tumour (16%). Upon admission, 47% of the patients were in a palliative care trajectory, 19% were treated with a curative intent, 28% were admitted pro diagnosis and for 6% it was unknown. Table 1 lists all care activities during last month of life.

Table 1

Care characteristics	total (n=94)	in a palliative trajectory (n=44)	not in a palliative trajectory (n=50)	P-value
Received chemotherapy	22%	27%	18%	0.281
Received radiotherapy	7%	11%	4%	0.175
Underwent an invasive procedure	40%	25%	54%	0.004*
Consultation specialist palliative care team	15%	18%	12%	0.401
<b>Diagnostics</b>				
CT scan	78%	70%	84%	0.116
MRI scan	18%	20%	16%	0.576
PET scan	6%	7%	6%	0.871

\*Patients in a palliative care trajectory less often underwent invasive procedures than patients in a curative or diagnostic trajectory.

## Conclusions

This retrospective chart review shows that a large proportion of cancer patients who die in a university hospital receive anticancer treatment and diagnostic interventions in their last month of life. Patients in palliative care trajectory receive as much interventions as patients in diagnostic or curative trajectory upon admission.

