Epidemiology

Estimates of the cancer incidence and mortality in Europe in 2006

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Background: Monitoring the evolution of the cancer burden in Europe is of great value. Estimates of the cancer burden in Europe have been published for 2004 and estimates are now being presented for cancer incidence and mortality in Europe for 2006.

Methods: The most recent sources of cancer incidence and mortality data have been collected and projections have been carried out using short-term prediction methods to produce estimated rates for 2006. Additional estimation was required where national incidence data were not available, and the method involved the projection of the aggregations of cancer incidence and mortality data from representative cancer registries. The estimated 2006 rates were applied to the corresponding estimated country population to obtain the best estimates of the cancer incidence and mortality in Europe in 2006.

Results: In 2006 in Europe, there were an estimated 3 191 600 cancer cases diagnosed (excluding nonmelanoma skin cancers) and 1 703 000 deaths from cancer. The most common form of cancers was breast cancer (429 900 cases, 13.5% of all cancer cases), followed by colorectal cancers (412 900, 12.9%) and lung cancer (386 300, 12.1%). Lung cancer, with an estimated 334 800 deaths (19.7% of total), was the most common cause of death from cancer, followed by colorectal (207 400 deaths), breast (131 900) and stomach (118 200) cancers.

Conclusions: The total number of new cases of cancer in Europe appears to have increased by 300 000 since 2004. With an estimated 3.2 million new cases (53% occurring in men, 47% in women) and 1.7 million deaths (56% in men, 44% in women) each year, cancer remains an important public health problem in Europe and the ageing of the European population will cause these numbers to continue to increase even if age-specific rates remain constant. Evidence-based public health measures exist to reduce the mortality of breast and colorectal cancer while the incidence of lung cancer, and several other forms of cancer, could be diminished by improved tobacco control.