

Teen cancer survival rates on the rise

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The first national report detailing survival for teenagers and young adults with cancer shows that survival rates climbed by about 11% over two decades. The University of Manchester findings, published in the *British Journal of Cancer* today, looked at survival across all cancers in people aged 13 to 24 between 1979 and 2001.

Previously, statistical information about cancers in people in this age group has been limited, as patients were treated as either a child or adult. Before now, the importance of classing young people as a separate group was not recognised.

It is now understood that the spectrum of cancers affecting young people is different from children and adults and their physical, social and educational needs are also unique.

This report, funded by Cancer Research UK, will serve as a baseline for monitoring and guiding health policy geared towards developing specialised cancer care for teenagers and young people.

Lead author, Professor Jillian Birch, director of Cancer Research UK's Paediatric and Familial Cancer Research Group at The University of Manchester, said: "We found that survival for teenagers and young people with cancer improved overall from 63 per cent between 1979 and 1984 to 74 per cent between 1996 and 2001, which is great news. But more needs to be done to drive this figure even higher.

"It's important that cancer services are tailored to suit teenagers and young adults, as their needs differ from older adults and children – clinically and psychologically. Research like this is needed to measure how much of an impact this tailored treatment could have."

The researchers analysed five-year survival in more than 30,000 13 to 24 year olds diagnosed with cancer in England between 1979 and 2001, and followed them up to 2003.

The greatest increase in survival rates was seen for leukaemia, which increased by 21 per cent over the 23 years studied. But survival for brain tumours, bone cancers and soft tissue sarcomas hasn't changed significantly since the mid-1980s.

Professor Birch added: "Our research has also identified cancers where survival rates remain poor, highlighting the need for continuing research in those areas to drive up survival."

Dr Lesley Walker, director of cancer information at Cancer Research UK, said: "Research like this is vital if we are to measure the impact of changes to the way teenagers with cancer are treated. Recruiting more young people on to clinical trials – which has been a priority for childhood cancer – will help this.

"It's important that this group of patients receive the most appropriate treatment, and Cancer Research UK will continue investing in research to work towards this goal."

Provided by University of Manchester