

One age does not fit all: geriatric cancer patients are not a single homogenous group

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Background

One out of six Australians are currently aged 65 and older and more than half of all cancers occur in this age group. This report describes trends and differences among cancer patients in this age category.

Methods

Demographic and clinical characteristics of Queensland residents diagnosed with invasive cancers at age 65 or older between 2006 and 2010 were extracted from the Queensland Oncology Repository. Comorbidities were derived from coded hospital admission data recorded at time of diagnosis.

Results

A total of 61,122 patients aged 65 and over were diagnosed with invasive cancers in Queensland in 2006-2010, of whom 49%, 37%, and 14% were aged 65-74, 75-84, and 85+, respectively. The proportion of females was 36% in 65-74 year-olds and increased to 50% in the 85+ group. The proportion of regional and rural patients decreased from 53% in 65-74 year-olds to 46% in those aged 85+. The histological verification rate dropped from 93% in the 65-74 group to 71% in the 85+ group, and the percentage of cancers with unspecified histology increased from 5% in the former to 21% in the latter group. The percentage of patients with one or more comorbidities increased from 27% in 65-74 year-olds to 37% in those aged 85+. Among the major cancers, there were marked trends in prostate cancer, which decreased from 23% of new cancers among 65-74 year-olds to 12% in those aged 85+, and lung cancer, which accounted for 12% of new cancers among 65-74 year-olds but only 8% in those aged 85+.

Conclusion

There are significant differences within the geriatric cancer population and treating them as one group may mask important requirements in health care among the elderly.