



Can Covid-19 challenge cancer?

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July 1st, 2020

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IN THE HELMHOLTZ ASSOCIATION

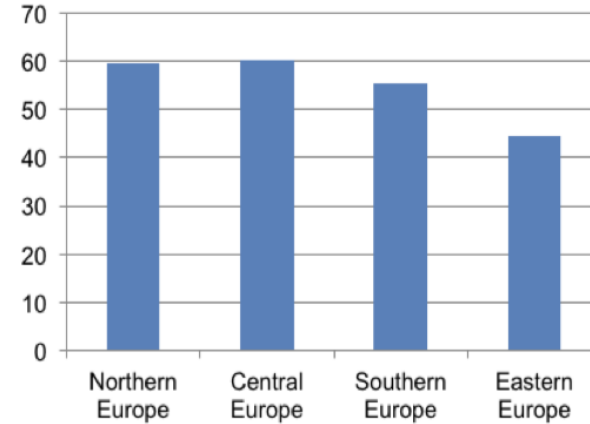


Research for a Life without Cancer

Cancer in Europe



- 3.7M new cases per year
- 1.9M deaths per year
(accounts for 20% of all deaths)
- 10-years survival 50%
- 12.5M survivors



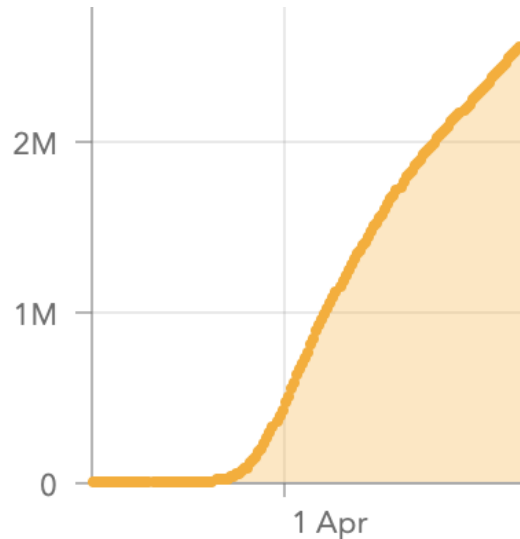
Survival rate for colorectal cancer in Europe (%).

(ECPC – Challenging the Europe disparities in cancer)

<https://ecpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ECPC-White-Paper-Europe-of-disparities-EN-3.pdf>

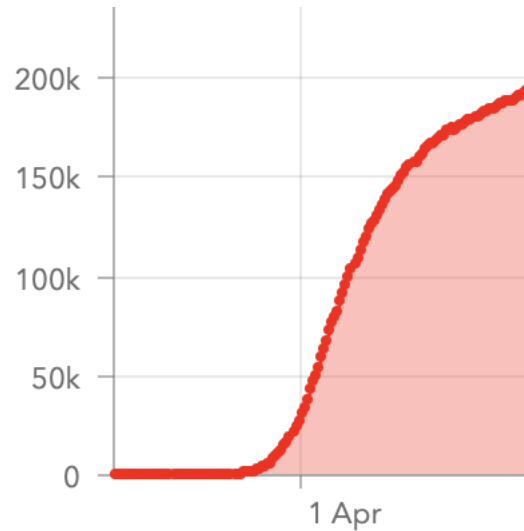
Covid-19 pandemic in Europe

Covid-19 cases



> 2.5M *

Covid-19 deaths



~ 200.000 *

January:

EU reported **first cases**

March:



WHO declared Covid-19 as
a **pandemic**

Challenges for cancer patients

- Risk of infection
- Risk of severe complications
- Treatments, screening and follow-up delayed or cancelled
- Modification of treatment
- Psychological burden, e.g. no accompanying persons allowed, missing information, perception of danger, anxiety
- ...



Caring for patients with cancer in the COVID-19 era

Joris van de Haar^{1,2,3,18}, Louisa R. Hoes^{1,3,18}, Charlotte E. Coles⁴, Kenneth Seamon⁴, Stefan Fröhling^{5,6}, Dirk Jäger⁷, Franco Valenza^{8,9}, Filippo de Braud^{8,9}, Luigi De Petris^{10,11}, Jonas Bergh^{10,11}, Ingemar Ernberg¹², Benjamin Besse¹³, Fabrice Barles^{13,14}, Elena Garralda¹⁵, Alejandro Piris-Giménez¹⁵, Michael Baumann^{5,16}, Giovanni Apolone⁷, Jean Charles Soria¹³, Josep Tabernero¹⁵, Carlos Caldas^{4,17} and Emile E. Voest^{1,3}  

Challenges for health care systems

- Unclear risks
- Risk of overloading the health care system (capacity)
- Priorization and triage
- Shortage in equipment, personnel, drugs, beds, ...
- ICU beds saved for Covid-19 patients
- Treatment side-effects in infected patients
 - immune deprivation
 - absence of guidance
- Decisions based on expert opinions

Risk of additional cancer deaths

- 20-30 % less patients
(due to anxiety and/or lack of capacity)
- Interrupted/cancelled screening
- changes of standard-of-care regimes



more advanced stages
(with worse prognosis)

suboptimal treatments

**The
Guardian**

**Coronavirus crisis could lead to 18,000
more cancer deaths, experts warn**

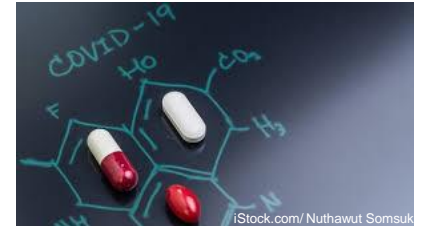
(BMJ 2020;369:m1735)

Challenges for cancer research

- Loss or delay of scientific results
- Spezialised (scientific) diagnostic testing unavailable
- Many new scientific questions, e.g.
effect of Covid-19 on immunological responses
(side-effects, treatment outcome)
- Long-term effects:
loss of funding, unemployed scientists, loss of focus ...

Preparing for the future

- Re-establishment of standard-of-care
- Capacity management
Coordination of therapy offers, exchange to assist affected regions (regional and supra-regional)
- Surveillance system for Covid-19 and cancer
- Prevent shortages in equipment and drugs
- Uphold awareness of growing cancer burden worldwide (e.g. Cancer Mission, Europe's Beating Cancer Action Plan, ...)
- Increase cancer research efforts and support



Covid-19 is indeed challenging cancer – we have to keep our focus balanced!



Fight Covid-19 without losing sight of other diseases

(Cell 2020: Biomedical Research Goes Viral: Dangers and Opportunities) DOI: [10.1016/j.cell.2020.05.014](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cell.2020.05.014) // Illustration: Charlie Padgett.

Thank you for your attention!