

CANCER OF UNKNOWN PRIMARY (CUP): A STUDY OF DATA INEQUALITY

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Cancer of
Unknown Primary
(CUP) Foundation

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INTRODUCTION – CUP NIHILISM

CUP is not just a hidden cancer in the body but has been, for too long, a hidden cancer in the representation of the UK's cancer picture. Until April 2011 you would not have seen Cancer of Unknown Primary (CUP) included in the top 10 cancers in Cancer Research UK (CRUK) or National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN) presentations: yet CUP is within the top 10 for incidence and mortality. Without representation it is difficult to argue for funding and patient support on the basis of national statistics. For example, CRUK data for 2007, showing Research spend versus Mortality and Incidence by cancer site, omits CUP. Cancer Australia, by comparison, includes CUP in equivalent presentations (AIHW, 2008a).

CUP patients and their relations do not believe they are being treated equally: they believe they are a neglected group where the lack of interest in their condition can often lead to sub-optimal treatment and care. It is difficult to dispute a causal link between data representation and data poverty or uncertainty, and limited research leading to poor patient outcomes.

Aim. The aim of this poster is to use published evidence to represent the CUP picture and explore the problems associated with classifying CUP and the historical failure to liberate information, without which it is impossible to improve outcomes for CUP patients.

Methodology. Meta-analysis of ONS, CRUK, NCIN incidence and mortality data compared with Cancer Australia, supplemented by recommendations made by the NICE CUP Guideline Group. This is augmented by empirical research findings on how CUP data is handled by Registries (Binysh, Osborne & Symons, 2011).

(C77 - 80)	No. of cases			No. of deaths		
	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons
England			9166			
Wales			546			
Scotland			934			
N. Ireland			305			
CUP	5028	5923	10,951	5248	6002	11,250
(% of Total)	(3.2%)	(3.8%)	(3.54%)			(7.2%)

Source: Extracted from Cancer Research UK.
info.cancerresearchuk.org/cancerstats. Apr 2011.

EPIDEMIOLOGY

The NICE Guideline (NICE, 2010) represented CUP as the 4th commonest cause of cancer mortality in England and Wales based on 2006 data. Following its publication, CRUK included CUP in their incidence data for 2007. For 2007 Cancer Research UK figures (using ICD-10 - C77-80 codes) showed CUP as the 6th most common cancer for women (4.4% of new cases) and the 8th most common for men (3.5% of new cases). (CRUK, 2011).

At 4% of cancer diagnoses, CUP incidence is the same as, or more than, those with known cancers such as Kidney, Stomach, Leukaemia, Pancreas, Ovary, and Malignant Melanoma.

Recent figures released by CRUK for 2008 – Table 1 above – (CRUK, 2011) show an improved picture but the reporting of the data is recognised as problematic and we would anticipate an increase in future years as the syndrome is captured more fully following the recommendations of the NICE Guidelines. The 2008 data show CUP in the 10 most commonly diagnosed cancers as "other sites & CUP" - CRUK Figure 2.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is not shy in representing CUP. CUP incidence in 2005 stood at 3% for males and 3.5% for females (ranking 7th commonest for both sexes). Mortality at 8.8% made CUP the 3rd commonest cause of cancer death (sexes combined) in Australia. (AIHW, 2008b).

Table 2: Incidence by ICD 10 Code C77-C80. United Kingdom. 2008

ICD Code:	Persons	Males	Females
C77: Secondary and unspecified malignant neoplasm of lymph nodes	854	437	417
C78: Secondary malignant neoplasm of respiratory and digestive organs	3,388	1,463	1,925
C79: Secondary malignant neoplasm of other sites	2,189	1,066	1,123
C80: Malignant neoplasm without specification of site	4,321	1,949	2,372
Total (C77-80)	10,752	4,915	5,837

Source: National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN), UK Cancer Information Service (UKCIS)

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Table 3: ICD-10 C77-80. UK. 1993-2008

Year	Incidence		Mortality	
	No. of new cases	Rate* per 100,000	No. of deaths	Rate per 100,000*
1993	14,693	19.6	14,420	19.3
1994	15,097	19.9	14,449	19.1
1995	15,118	19.7	14,654	19.0
1996	15,838	20.4	15,024	19.4
1997	15,777	20.1	14,949	19.1
1998	14,972	19.0	15,259	19.3
1999	14,373	18.1	14,666	18.4
2000	14,013	17.3	14,559	18
2001	13,824	16.8	14,252	17.1
2002	13,428	16.1	14,058	16.7
2003	12,875	15.3	13,625	16.0
2004	12,640	14.8	13,288	15.4
2005	12,011	13.9	12,801	14.5
2006	11,566	13.1	12,267	13.7
2007	11,120	12.4	11,970	13.0
2008	10,752	11.9	11,228	12.0

*Age-standardised to the European Population

Source: National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN), UK Cancer Information Service (UKCIS)

CONCLUSION

Patients with CUP face the double agony of a cancer diagnosis and the recognition that it is a condition that is little understood. Initiatives, such as the evidence-based NICE Guideline of 2010, encourage CUP to be tackled consistently and for it to appear fully on the canvas of the national cancer picture. The nihilistic approach to CUP where practiced by clinicians and statisticians - the hope that the "too difficult" problem will be solved by chance or disappear - is unethical, unscientific and an insult to patients. Uncertainty in medicine is often seen as failure; and a CUP diagnosis as a failure of diagnosis rather than a diagnosis in its own right. It is only by capturing the data and presenting CUP fully and fairly that action, in particular research, can be encouraged.

•Even by existing measures, CUP falls firmly within the "top 10" of cancers for incidence and mortality. CRUK recognises in the latest data presentation that the full burden of disease may not be captured (CRUK, 2011). Diagnoses may be included within other ICD codes. Qualification of the data may be necessary because of the unique features of the disease and its progression.

•The incidence and mortality of CUP is falling (Table 3) and there is an increase in one year survival (data not presented in this poster but UK 1 year relative survival for 2004-2008 stands at 16% , male and female). This has been achieved partly through improved diagnosis and improving treatment regimen.

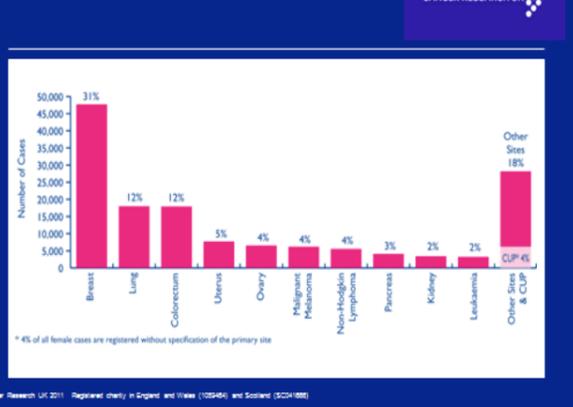
•The UK has lagged behind other countries, such as Australia, in representing the problem of CUP. Historically, CUP may have been relegated because of the difficulties of achieving a simple definition or classification of a disease spectrum; but this argument is specious if it is accepted that CUP is captured by identified ICD codes.

•There are new initiatives presently underway in the UK that should encourage greater recognition of CUP in national statistics: the introduction of Peer Review Measures with regard to the CUP Guideline; the review of NICE's Referral Guidelines for suspected cancer; and the data emerging from Acute Oncology practice about CUP.

•Echoing the recommendations of the NICE Guideline, data and coding definitions for MUO and CUP should be developed and agreed nationally. A national audit should be established for MUO and CUP patients based on the agreed minimum data set. (NICE, 2010).

•The introduction of the NICE CUP classification and the move to a single IT system within registries present an opportunity to bring about greater consistency in the recording of CUP including MUO.

Figure Two: The 10 Most Commonly Diagnosed Cancers in Females, UK, 2008



WHAT CONSTITUTES CUP?

CUP does not have a discrete classification within the International Classification of Disease (ICD) nomenclature. The WHO ICD codes, which capture registrations of CUP in the UK, are usually ICD-10 C77 to C80. See Table 2.

However, there is no international agreement. The Australian CUP data are based on C26 (Malignant neoplasm of other and ill-defined digestive organs), C39 (Malignant neoplasm of other and ill-defined sites in the respiratory system and intrathoracic organs), C76, and C80. (WHO embrace C76-80 in a group defined as Malignant neoplasms of ill-defined, secondary and unspecified sites. WHO, 2007).

Research amongst UK Registries in 2011 indicates that there is a lack of clarity in defining CUP. (Binysh, Osborne & Symons, 2011). Responses indicate also that Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data input from MDTs is inconsistent. This is likely to be caused by the lack of rules for recording CUP leading to variability between MDTs in terms of the precision of the diagnosis recorded. MDTs are likely to have different thresholds for attributing a probable site-specific diagnosis when further investigation is needed. Anecdotal evidence suggests also that CUP patients reviewed at MDTs are often classified as having a probable primary tumour which corresponds to the site-specialty of the MDT.

There is no universal agreement on recording CUP and this, in part, reflects the lack of a universally agreed definition of CUP and the nature of the WHO codes.

If we assume that existing data capture, to some extent, pCUP and cCUP – see NICE definitions - the addition of MUO, were it to be added to the overall CUP picture, is likely to increase incidence figures significantly.

CUP DEFINED IN THE NICE GUIDELINE (NICE, 2010).

Malignancy of undefined primary origin (MUO): Metastatic malignancy identified on the basis of a limited number of tests, without an obvious primary site, before comprehensive investigation.

Provisional carcinoma of unknown primary (pCUP): Metastatic epithelial or neuroendocrine malignancy identified on the basis of histology/cytology, with no primary site detected despite a selected initial screen of investigations, before specialist review and possible further specialised investigations.

Confirmed carcinoma of unknown primary (cCUP): Metastatic epithelial or neuroendocrine malignancy identified on the basis of final histology, with no primary site detected despite a selected initial screen of investigations, specialist review, and further specialised investigations as appropriate.

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