

UK breast cancer care outcomes: A comparison with Europe



What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer can occur in several different parts of the breast, with the two most common types of breast cancer developing in ducts of the breast and the cells that line the breast duct.¹

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK.² About one in eight women in the UK will be diagnosed with breast cancer at some point during their lifetime.¹ There are several symptoms for breast cancer. These include: a change in the size and/or shape of the breast; a lump being found on the breast; and pains in the breast.³ Breast cancer can also affect men, although this is very rare. Only 350 men are diagnosed with breast cancer in the UK each year compared to approximately 50,000 cases in women.²

There are several different treatments for different types of breast cancer. The most common treatments include surgery, chemotherapy, hormone therapy and radiotherapy.¹

This briefing provides an overview of breast cancer outcomes in the UK and Europe informed by the findings from the Institute of Health Economics' (IHE) *Comparator Report on Access to cancer medicines in Europe revisited*.⁴

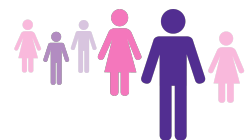
UK patient outcomes for breast cancer



The UK's breast cancer statistics compare poorly in relation to those of its European neighbours. With 129.2 per 100,000, the UK has one of the highest incidence rates for breast cancer in Europe.⁴ Mortality rates for breast cancer in the UK are also above the EU average, with 24.8 per 100,000 compared to an EU average of 22.4 per 100,000.⁴

Incidence of cancer is increasing across the whole of Europe and whilst demographic factors contribute to this increase, this alone does not explain the higher incidence rate in the UK, which experiences similar demographic changes to the rest of Europe.⁴

Improved screening methods and earlier diagnosis in the UK have led breast cancer survival rates to increase by 9% over the past 20 years.⁴ However, despite this increase, the UK's breast survival rate remains below the European average, with 81.5% compared to 83.71% respectively.⁴



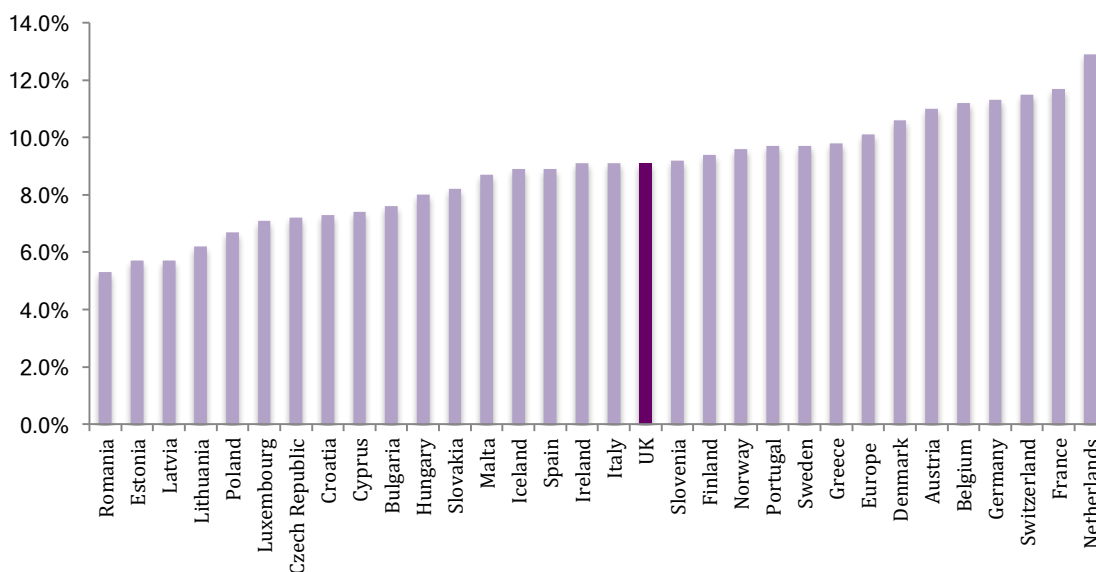
Further improvements can be made to timely referral and patient access to effective treatment to help increase survival rates for breast cancer patients in the UK.

Incidence rates in the UK are higher than the European average for breast cancer⁴

Cancer spending

The UK spends less on both cancer as a proportion of total health spend and on health overall compared to other comparable European countries.⁴ According to the IHE report, the UK's spend on healthcare as a percentage of GDP is 1% lower and per capita spending on cancer in the UK is €41 lower than the European average.

Health spending as percentage of GDP, 2014⁴



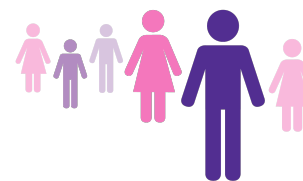
The Netherlands spends over three times more on breast cancer per capita than the UK⁴

The UK spends only 8% of its cancer budget on breast cancer. This is 3% lower than Germany and 7% lower than the spend in the Netherlands, which are amongst the highest spending countries in Europe. When expressed as per capita spend the difference in spend between the UK and Germany and the Netherlands becomes more pronounced. The UK spends €10.24 per capita on breast cancer, whilst Germany spends almost triple this amount on breast cancer (€28.05 per capita). The Netherlands, which has a similar incidence rate to the UK, spends €36.45 per capita on breast cancer.⁴

The patient journey

Diagnosis

Advanced screening techniques have helped to improve the pace and accuracy of diagnosis for breast cancer.⁵ Breast cancer patients are also the most likely in the England to be diagnosed following referral by their GP to a specialist under the 'two week wait', with nearly half of all cases diagnosed through this route.⁵



Nearly half of all breast cancer patients are diagnosed following the two week wait⁵

Access to new treatments



Traditionally, the UK's uptake of new medicines has been relatively low compared to other European countries, which has meant cancer patients in the UK have had fewer treatment options.⁴ This is also illustrated by the findings of the report from the IHE. The report shows that the uptake of trastuzumab for the treatment of breast cancer in the UK was below that of the other big five EU countries over the past decade.⁴

In England, 19 treatments for breast cancer have been approved through NICE since 2000 whilst further medicines were made available through the Cancer Drugs Fund (CDF).^{6,7} Between 2007 and 2016, no new breast cancer treatments were approved by NICE.⁸

Since the introduction of the CDF in 2011, patient access to treatment has improved. However, recent reforms introduced to the CDF should be monitored to ensure patients continue to have timely access to new breast cancer treatments.

Patient experience

According to the 2015 National Cancer Patient Experience Survey, which surveys over 100,000 cancer patients in England, breast cancer patients were both more likely to understand their condition and the treatments available to them than patients affected by other cancers, suggesting positive interactions with healthcare professionals. However, these positive interactions are at risk, with the number of people reporting that they found it easy to contact their Cancer Nurse Specialist below the average and decreasing compared to previous years.⁹

“Nine out of ten people with breast cancer in England felt that they waited an appropriate length of time for tests to be carried out”⁹

The future of breast cancer care

The UK has a higher incidence of breast cancer compared to the rest of Europe, and survival rates remain below the European average.⁴ This means that outcomes for people with breast cancer in the UK are worse than the rest of Europe, and whilst steps have been taken to improve diagnosis, there is still room for improvements in the uptake of successful treatments to bring outcomes in line with the rest of Europe.

In order to ensure the system is ready to tackle the future challenges that the UK faces for breast cancer, it is important that:

- **Focus on screening and early diagnosis** of breast cancer is continued to further improve patient outcomes
- **Inequalities in breast cancer five year survival outcomes** are addressed to ensure that the UK closes the gap with the best performing countries in Europe
- **Reimbursement, funding and uptake** pathways for innovative treatments are optimised to enable better patient access to effective treatment

About this briefing

This briefing has been developed following the publication of the *Comparator Report on patient access to cancer medicines in Europe revisited* by the Swedish Institute for Health Economics. It aims to highlight the key findings of the report in relation to the UK's breast cancer outcomes in the European context. Whilst the briefing primarily draws on the findings of the report, it also brings together additional relevant data sources.

References

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⁴ The Swedish Institute for Health Economics, *Access to cancer medicines in Europe revisited*, 2016 available at: http://ihe.se/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/IHE-Report_2016_4.pdf, accessed February 2017

⁵ National Cancer Registration and Analysis Service, *Routes to diagnosis*, 2016, available at: http://www.ncin.org.uk/publications/routes_to_diagnosis, accessed February 2017

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⁷ NHS England, *Cancer Drugs Fund list*, 2017, available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/cancer/cdf/cancer-drugs-fund-list/>, accessed February 2017

⁸ Breast Cancer Now, *Access to Medicines: A system fit for the future?*, 2016, available at: <http://breastcancer.org/news-and-blogs/news/current-drug-options-for-breast-cancer-in-england-may-never-be-improved>, accessed February 2017

⁹ Quality Health, *2015 National cancer Patient Experience Survey*, 2016 available at: <https://www.quality-health.co.uk/surveys/national-cancer-patient-experience-survey>, accessed February 2017