

Improvements in the diagnostic process of sarcomas. Effects of a national implemented cancer pathway

J. Keller, H. Dyrop, A. Safwat, K. Maretty-Nielsen, B. Hauge Hansen, P. Holmberg Jørgensen, T. Baad Hansen, P. Vedsted

Sarcoma Center of Aarhus University Hospital, Aarhus, Denmark, Experimental Clinical Oncology, Aarhus University Hospital, Aarhus, Denmark, The Research Unit for General Practice, University of Aarhus, Aarhus, Denmark

Background and purpose: Delay in cancer diagnosis and treatment is a universal challenge. We describe the effect of a political attempt to accelerate the diagnostic and treatment process with implementation of cancer pathways in a large sarcoma centre.

Methods: The National Health Board has in collaboration with the medical specialty societies standardized the diagnostic processes and defined a "cancer pathway" for each cancer form with specific time limits for the diagnostic period until treatment start. The inclusion criteria for suspicion of a soft tissue sarcoma or a bone sarcoma was a MR-scanning of the tumor with suspicion of malignancy and at least one of the following symptoms: Soft tissue tumor > 5 cm, soft tissue tumor on or below the fascia, fast growing soft tissue tumor, palpable bone tumor or deep persisting bone pains. In the sarcoma centre we reviewed the data of all the 1126 referred patients from 2 years before and 2 years after the implementation of the cancer pathway. For each patient we calculated the mile stones, time intervals and registered the size of the tumor at referral.

Results: Median soft tissue tumor size at referral was reduced from 7.0 to 4.9 cm Median time from referral to start of treatment was reduced from 28 to 18 working days for soft tissue tumors and from 31 to 14 days for bone tumors.

Interpretation A political initiated cancer pathway for sarcoma significantly accelerated the diagnostic process.