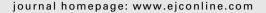


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Neuroblastoma incidence and survival in European children (1978–1997): Report from the Automated Childhood Cancer Information System project

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ARTICLEINFO

Keywords:
Childhood cancer
Neuroblastoma
Registry
Europe
Survival
Incidence
Trend

ABSTRACT

The Automated Childhood Cancer Information System (ACCIS) collects and presents data on childhood cancer in Europe. This report describes trends (1978–1997) and geographical differences (1988–1997) in incidence and survival for 6202 children with neuroblastoma from 59 registries in 19 countries, grouped into five regions (British Isles, West, East, North, and South). The age-standardised incidence rate (ASR) of neuroblastoma in Europe in 1988–1997 was 10.9 cases per million children, being highest in infants (52.6). The ASR of neuroblastoma increased in Europe from 8.4 in 1978–1982 to 11.6 in 1993–1997, mostly due to an increase in infants (from 35.4 to 57.8). Overall 5-year survival was 59%, ranging from 47% (East) to 67% (West). It improved markedly from 37% in 1978–1982 to 66% in 1993–1997, especially in infants. A certain amount of overdiagnosis in children under 2 years of age may explain the increased incidence rates and partially the increase in survival. Survival of older children (aged 2–14 years), which is likely to be largely affected by therapy, has also improved from 21% to 45%.

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1. Introduction

Neuroblastoma is a typical example of an embryonal tumour of childhood. ^{1,2} In developed countries it is the most common tumour in infants (children aged less than 1 year), whereafter its occurrence decreases gradually with age; it is rare in school children and almost never seen in adolescents.

Neuroblastoma and related tumours (ganglioneuroblastoma and ganglioneuroma) arise from the neural crest cells that colonise sympathetic ganglia and adrenal medulla in foetal life. These neoplasms are a family of tumours characterised by an array of biological and clinical features ranging from spontaneous regression and the capability of differentiation to benign neoplasm in infants, but potentially aggressively

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disseminating in older children.^{1,2} The aetiology of neuroblastoma is largely unknown.^{1–4} The raised risks of being diagnosed with neuroblastoma in either early- or late-stage disease support the hypothesis that neuroblastoma consists of at least two distinct disease entities.^{2,4}

Prognosis for neuroblastoma is related to extent of disease at diagnosis, infants with localised disease having the best chance of survival. Other prognostic factors are biological features, such as histopathology, tumour ploidy and MYCN amplification. These features are used clinically to assign neuroblastoma patients to risk groups with tailored therapeutic strategies. ^{1,2,5}

This dependence of survival on stage and age, together with the availability of a simple urine test for a tumour marker, made neuroblastoma seem an ideal, and thus-far only, candidate for screening. 1,6-10 Studies of the feasibility or effectiveness of neuroblastoma screening were carried out in England, France, Germany and North America in the 1990s. 9-12 Until recently, screening was mandatory in Japan. The results of the recent major evaluations of neuroblastoma screening led to a non-introduction in Germany and discontinuation of the screening programme in Japan. 13

This paper presents incidence and survival rates for neuroblastoma among European children, diagnosed during 1978–1997 and made available in the framework of the Automated Childhood Cancer Information System (ACCIS), a collaborative project of 80 population-based cancer registries in 35 European countries. ¹⁴ In the interpretation of the observed geographical and temporal patterns of incidence and survival we consider screening activities as they occurred during the study period in the areas covered, as well as the insights into the nature of neuroblastoma gained from these screening studies.

2. Material and methods

Analyses are based on the ACCIS database, which is described in detail elsewhere [Steliarova-Foucher, Kaatsch, Lacour and colleagues, this issue]. The ACCIS Scientific Committee evaluated quality and comparability of the registry data-sets, using standard¹⁵ and specific criteria for childhood data-sets. All cases of neuroblastoma (including ganglioneuroblastoma) as defined by diagnostic group IV (a) in the International Classification of Childhood Cancer¹⁶ were included. The analyses are based on a grand total of 6202 neuroblastoma cases from 59 contributing registries in 19 countries. Details of coverage and data quality are presented in Table 1. Countries were grouped into five regions (North, British Isles, West, East, and South), according to geographical location combined with data availability (Table 1). The regional comparisons are based on the most recent 10-year period 1988–1997. Time trends are presented by 5-year periods from 1978 to 1997. Numbers of cases and data quality indicators for the time trend analyses are shown in Table 2. Variation in incidence is reported for age-groups 0, 1-4, 5-9, and 10-14 years. In addition, we also report survival results for the age group 2-14 years, which is outside the target age-range for screening and consists mostly of advanced stage cases. 1,2,6-9,11,12 In the absence of stage-specific information these data can be used as an indicator for changes in survival related to improvements in therapy.

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Table 1 – Data-sets contributed by the European cancer registries for the analyses of neuroblastoma incidence and survival in children (age 0–14 years), with indicators of coverage, data quality, and follow-up (Source: ACCIS)	Notes			P Nb						א פי ע								
	Survival analysis	Median	Years	2.7	12.0		9.0		8.7		6.5	9.3	10.5	6.7	6.3		11.4	8.6
		FU > 5 years	%	0	66		0		85		70	78	78	65	61		84	72
		Closing date		31.12.1998	31.1.2001		31.12.1999		31.12.1999		1.9.2000	31.12.1998	1.1.2000	31.12.1997	31.12.1987		31.12.1997	31.12.1998
		и		18	1309		6		152		100	42	423	192	243		144	178
	Basis of diagnosis	Unknown	%	0	∇		0		0		0	0	0	0	0		7	0
		DCO	%	0	7		0		0		0	0	ı	0	0		1	0
		MV	%	94	93		29		8		66	86	26	100	100		97	100
	и			18	1327		6		152		101	45	428	206	320		156	184
	Time- trend				+				+			+	+	+	+		+	+
	Period			1994–1997	1978–1995		1993–1996		1978–1997		1989–1997	1978–1997	1978-1997	1978-1997	1978–1989		1978–1997	1978–1997
	Registry			IRELAND, National	UNITED KINGDOM,	England & Wales	UNITED KINGDOM,	Northern Ireland	UNITED KINGDOM,	Scotland	BELARUS, National	ESTONIA, National	HUNGARY, National	SLOVAKIA, National	GERMANY, NCR	(only former East)	DENMARK, National	FINLAND, National
Table 1 – Dat coverage, da	Region			British Isles							East						North	

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