COVID-19 Cancer Surgery Delays Could Cost Lives

British researchers crunched the numbers and saw serious cause for concern if cancer surgeries are delayed three to six months.

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Even a three- or six-month delay in cancer surgeries due to the COVID-19 pandemic could have a serious negative impact on the survival of people with malignancies, according to a report in the Annals of Oncology.

Amit Sud, MBChB, PhD, of the Institute of Cancer Research in London, and colleagues analyzed data from observational studies and applied them to age-specific and cancer stage-specific survival statistics for England between 2013 and 2017. They used mathematical modeling to project how a delay of three or six months in cancer surgery would affect survival.

The study authors found that 94,912 cancer surgeries lead to 80,406 people being considered long-term survivors of cancer, yielding a cumulative gain of 1.72 million years of life.

Delaying cancer by three months would lead to 4,755 deaths attributable to cancer and 208,275 cumulative lost years of life, while a six-month delay would lead to 10,760 cancer deaths and a 92,214 lost years.

The average years of life gained as a result of cancer surgery is 18.1 years per person under standard conditions, 17.1 years with a delay of three months and 15.9 years with a delay of six months. So delaying surgery by three months lead to a loss of 0.97 years of life per person while delaying by six months leads to a loss of 2.19 years of life per person.

“Modest delays in surgery for cancer incur significant impact on survival,” the study authors concluded. “To avoid a downstream public health crisis of avoidable cancer deaths, cancer diagnostic and surgical pathways must be maintained at normal throughput, with rapid attention to any backlog already accrued.”

To read the study, click here.

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