

Causes and outcomes of emergency presentation of rectal cancer

Harry Comber¹, Linda Sharp², Marianna de Camargo Cancela³, Trutz Haase⁴, Howard Johnson⁵ and Jonathan Pratschke⁶

¹ National Cancer Registry, Cork, T12 CDF7, Ireland

² Institute of Health & Society, Newcastle University, United Kingdom

³ Division of Population Research, Brazilian National Cancer Institute, Rio De Janeiro, Brazil

⁴ Social and Economic Consultant, Dublin, Ireland

⁵ Health & Wellbeing Directorate Health, Intelligence Unit, Health Service Executive, Ireland

⁶ Department of Economics and Statistics, University of Salerno, Salerno, Italy

Emergency presentation of rectal cancer carries a relatively poor prognosis, but the roles and interactions of causative factors remain unclear. We describe an innovative statistical approach which distinguishes between direct and indirect effects of a number of contextual, patient and tumour factors on emergency presentation and outcome of rectal cancer. All patients diagnosed with rectal cancer in Ireland 2004–2008 were included. Registry information, linked to hospital discharge data, provided data on patient demographics, comorbidity and health insurance; population density and deprivation of area of residence; tumour type, site, grade and stage; treatment type and optimality; and emergency presentation and hospital caseload. Data were modelled using a structural equation model with a discrete-time survival outcome, allowing us to estimate direct and mediated effects of the above factors on hazard, and their inter-relationships. Two thousand seven hundred and fifty patients were included in the analysis. Around 12% had emergency presentations, which increased hazard by 80%. Affluence, private patient status and being married reduced hazard indirectly by reducing emergency presentation. Older patients had more emergency presentations, while married patients, private patients or those living in less deprived areas had fewer than expected. Patients presenting as an emergency were less likely to receive optimal treatment or to have this in a high caseload hospital. Apart from stage, emergency admission was the strongest determinant of poor survival. The factors contributing to emergency admission in this study are similar to those associated with diagnostic delay. The socio-economic gradient found suggests that patient education and earlier access to endoscopic investigation for public patients could reduce emergency presentation.

Rectal cancer commonly presents as an emergency, and in up to 15% of cases the first presentation is unplanned.¹ Patients presenting as an emergency tend to have poorer survival.^{1–4} Emergency presentation may have been preceded by bowel obstruction, vomiting, haemorrhage or other comorbidity, contributing to poorer post-operative survival. However the survival deficit persists for up to one year post-operatively⁴, in part due to the more advanced stage of the disease. Patients who present as an emergency are also more likely to be older, poorer, unmarried and to have more comorbid conditions^{2,4} and to present to non-specialist centres.

Most quantitative investigations of the factors leading to emergency presentation and delay in diagnosis have used Cox proportional hazards models, in which the relationship between prognostic factors is dealt with by adjustment,

obscuring the role of mediating factors. This approach does not permit measurement of the extent to which any factor exerts a direct influence on the hazard, or an indirect one, mediated by one or more other factors.

Our primary objective was to assess the impact of socio-economic inequalities—in particular age, deprivation, marital status and possession of private health insurance—on survival from rectal cancer, and the role of emergency presentation in the observed variation in outcomes. Inequality in outcome is an important topic in itself, but variations between different groups can shed further light on the overall determinants of survival from rectal cancer.

Methods

All cases of carcinoma of rectal/rectosigmoid cancer (ICD 10 sites C19 and C20) registered by the Irish National Cancer Registry (NCR) as incident during 2004–2008 were included in this study. The Registry has registered all incident cancers in the population of Ireland since 1994; completeness of registration of colon cancers has been estimated to be at least 97–98%.⁵ Patients who received no active tumour-directed treatment, defined as any resection, surgery (excluding bypass, reconstructive and cosmetic procedures), chemotherapy or radiotherapy with a primary aim of removing or reducing the tumour in the year following diagnosis, were excluded from analysis.

Key words: rectal, emergency, survival, deprivation, insurance

Grant sponsor: Irish Cancer Society; **Grant number:** HIC12COM

DOI: 10.1002/ijc.30149

History: Received 7 Dec 2015; Accepted 6 Apr 2016; Online 18 Apr 2016

Correspondence to: Dr Harry Comber, Interim Director, National Cancer Registry, Building 6800, Cork Airport Business Park, Kinsale Road, Cork, T12 CDF7, Ireland, Tel: +353214318014, Fax: +353 21 431 8016, E-mail: h.comber@ncri.ie

What's new?

Regardless of cancer stage, emergency admission for rectal cancer carries a higher death rate than planned admission. To understand what leads to emergency presentation, these authors devised a new statistical technique to distinguish direct and indirect effects of various factors, including possession of private insurance, age and marital status. The factors that contributed to emergency presentation are similar to those that cause a delay in diagnosis: age, poverty, marital status. Thus, they conclude, patient education and improved access to screening for patients on public insurance would reduce the number of emergency admissions.

Information on patient age, sex and marital status, tumour stage, grade and treatment was obtained from NCR data. A Haase Pratschke affluence/deprivation score⁶ was assigned to each case based on the area of residence of the patient at the time of diagnosis. Population density of the area of residence was obtained from the 2006 census of population⁷ and divided into approximate population tertiles of <1, 1–14.99 and ≥ 15 person per ha.

Treatment optimality was determined by comparison with the stage-specific recommendations of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) version 4.2013⁸ and classified as sub-optimal (less intensive treatment, or fewer modalities, than recommended by NCCN guidelines) or optimal/more aggressive (treatment according to the guidelines or using additional modalities).

Hospital of main treatment was determined for each patient from NCR data. In most cases the main hospital was that in which the patient had their major surgical procedure. For patients not having surgery (17%) the main hospital was defined as that of radiotherapy, of chemotherapy or other tumour-directed treatment. Caseload for the main hospital was calculated as the annual average number of rectal cancer patients admitted during the study period, whether or not they received active treatment. Hospitals were classified as “low caseload” if 100 or fewer rectal cancer patients were admitted annually, and as “high caseload” otherwise.

Information on admission type (planned or emergency), comorbidity and public/private patient status was added by linkage to the hospital in-patient episode (HIPE) database, which was available for all patients admitted to public hospitals. For patients who had no admissions to public hospitals (222, 6.5%), this information was coded as “planned,” the modal value. Comorbidity was calculated using the Charlson score, excluding the rectal cancer from the calculation. For 462 (15%) of patients no information was available on comorbidity; these were treated as having the modal value of 0. Information on health insurance was inferred from whether or not patients were treated privately. Uninsured patients in Ireland bear the full cost of private care in both public and private hospitals and rarely opt for this, while insured patients normally opt for private care. We therefore assumed that patients treated privately in public hospitals, as indicated in HIPE, and all those treated in private hospitals, had private health insurance.

Survival was calculated by linkage to death certificates provided by the Central Statistics Office, which gave date and

cause of death. All patients not confirmed by this linkage to be dead were considered alive on the censoring date of 31/12/2011. Survival was modelled using a discrete-time survival model, which allows a survival outcome to be included within an arbitrarily complex Structural Equation Model.^{9,10} The discrete-time survival model is very valuable for the present analysis, as it allows us to treat the influence of patient characteristics as being potentially mediated by emergency admission, caseload, stage of disease and treatment optimality, with treatment also depending on the aforementioned variables. In order to test these mediated effects, it is necessary to estimate a Structural Equation Model with a discrete-time survival outcome, a complex statistical model which can now be estimated using commercially-available software. This novel approach has the potential to shed light on an important and policy-relevant set of research questions regarding pathways of influence and mediation effects.

Figure 1 shows the model structure and all variables available for analysis, which were grouped into background variables—patient characteristics, tumour characteristics, contextual measures and year of diagnosis—and process of care variables—stage of disease, type of admission, treatment optimality and hospital caseload. The model examines the relationship of background characteristics (age, sex, deprivation, marital status, urban/rural residence, tumour site, grade and year of diagnosis) to stage at diagnosis, and the influence of background characteristics, as well as stage of disease, hospital caseload and planned/emergency presentation, on treatment optimality. Caseload, late stage, optimum treatment and planned/emergency presentation were also regressed on background characteristics. The model also allows all of the above variables to influence survival directly.

In order to simplify the calculation and interpretation of the indirect effects, we report results for a model which specifies classical linear regression equations for all dependent variables, regardless of their measurement scale (with the exception of the dichotomous survival indicators). All models were estimated using version 5.21 of the software package MPlus¹⁰ using the MLR estimator.

Results**Patient, cancer, and treatment characteristics**

Of 3,517 rectal carcinomas incident in 2004–2008, 2,750 (78%) had at least one episode of tumour-directed treatment

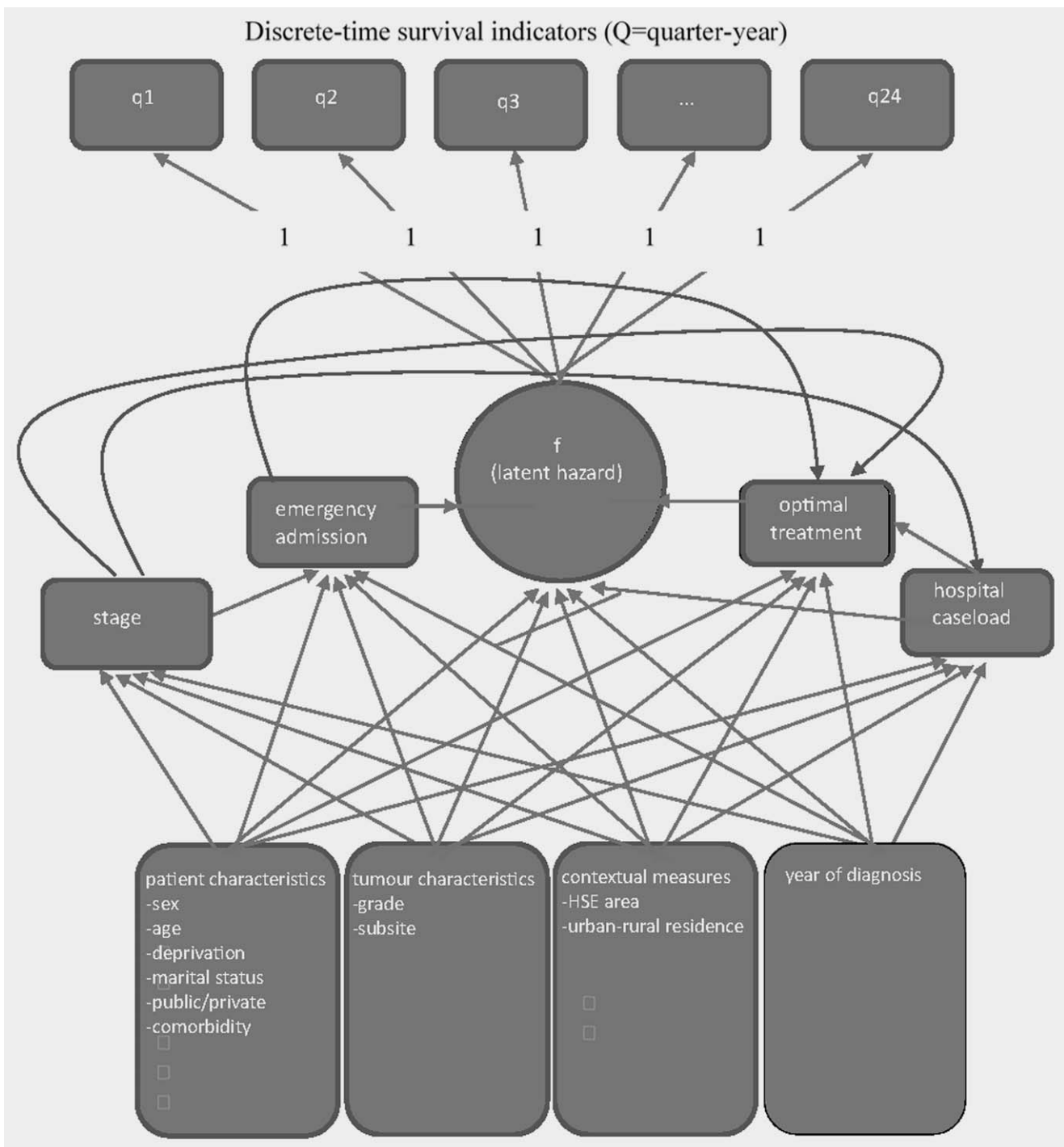


Figure 1. Model structure.

and were included in the analysis. Of these, 88% of patients had a planned admission, while 12% were admitted as an emergency (Table 1) and 83% had surgery. Emergency admission was significantly more common in older patients and in those who were unmarried, smokers, those with one or more co-morbid conditions, public patients and those living in the most deprived areas or living in rural areas. Proximal cancers more often presented as an emergency, as

did those in more advanced stages or with unknown grade. Cancers presenting as an emergency had less aggressive treatment and were more likely to be treated in low case-load hospitals.

Statistical models of hazard: direct effects

At the end of the study period, 29% of emergency admissions were alive, compared to 46% of those admitted routinely. In

Table 1. Patient, cancer and treatment characteristics by admission type

	Planned (N = 2708)		Emergency (N = 342)		Total	Chi-square
Year of incidence						
2004	453	(86%)	73	(14%)	526	0.146
2005	459	(86%)	72	(14%)	531	
2006	453	(86%)	74	(14%)	527	
2007	537	(90%)	61	(10%)	598	
2008	506	(89%)	62	(11%)	568	
Vital status at end of followup						
Alive	1304	(93%)	100	(7%)	1404	0.001
Dead	1104	(82%)	242	(18%)	1346	
Age at diagnosis						
<60	702	(92%)	63	(8%)	765	<0.001
60-69	697	(89%)	86	(11%)	783	
70-79	703	(86%)	112	(14%)	815	
80+	306	(79%)	81	(21%)	387	
Sex						
Male	1,578	(88%)	210	(12%)	1,788	0.134
Female	830	(86%)	132	(14%)	962	
Marital status						
Married	1,536	(90%)	173	(10%)	1,709	<0.001
Unmarried	872	(84%)	169	(16%)	1,041	
Smoking status						
Current smoker	433	(83%)	89	(17%)	522	<0.001
Never smoked	933	(86%)	149	(14%)	1,082	
Ex-smoker	536	(91%)	55	(9%)	591	
Unknown	506	(91%)	49	(9%)	555	
Payment status						
Private patient	876	(93%)	66	(7%)	942	<0.001
Public patient	1,447	(84%)	269	(16%)	1,716	
Unknown	85	(92%)	7	(8%)	92	
Area deprivation quintile						
1 (least deprived)	463	(90%)	52	(10%)	515	<0.001
2	504	(89%)	65	(11%)	569	
3	496	(90%)	57	(10%)	553	
4	475	(88%)	62	(12%)	537	
5 (most deprived)	465	(82%)	103	(18%)	568	
Region of residence						
Dublin/Mid-Leinster	644	(88%)	84	(12%)	728	<0.001
Dublin/North-east	457	(89%)	59	(11%)	516	
South	739	(91%)	71	(9%)	810	
West	558	82%)	126	(18%)	684	
Urban/rural residence						
High-urban	843	(89%)	106	(11%)	949	0.007
Intermediate-urban	532	(90%)	59	(10%)	591	
Rural	825	(85%)	144	(15%)	969	
Cancer site						

Table 1. Patient, cancer and treatment characteristics by admission type (Continued)

	Planned (N = 2708)		Emergency (N = 342)		Total	Chi-square
Rectosigmoid	528	(84%)	103	(16%)	631	0.001
Rectum	1,880	(89%)	239	(11%)	2,119	
Stage at diagnosis						
Stage I	390	(94%)	25	(6%)	415	<0.001
Stage II	589	(85%)	100	(15%)	689	
Stage III	953	(89%)	115	(11%)	1,068	
Stage IV	467	(82%)	100	(18%)	567	
Unknown	9	(82%)	2	(18%)	11	
Grade						
Low/intermediate	1,872	(89%)	238	(11%)	2,110	0.002
High	249	(86%)	42	(14%)	291	
Unknown	287	(82%)	62	(18%)	349	
Charlson comorbidity score						
0	1,666	(88%)	229	(12%)	1,895	0.001
1	297	(82%)	66	(18%)	363	
2	170	(81%)	39	(19%)	209	
Unknown	275	(97%)	8	(3%)	283	
Treatment intensity						
Less aggressive	968	(84%)	182	(16%)	1,150	<0.001
Optimal	1,259	(89%)	153	(11%)	1,412	
More aggressive	181	(96%)	7	(4%)	188	
Caseload of main hospital						
1 (lowest caseload quintile)	534	88%)	70	(12%)	604	<0.001
2	434	84%)	85	(16%)	519	
3	445	83%)	88	(17%)	533	
4	461	93%)	35	(7%)	496	
5 (highest caseload quintile)	499	93%)	39	(7%)	538	
Unknown	35	58%)	25	(42%)	60	

multivariate analyses, considering direct effects only, emergency admission increased the hazard by 80% (HR compared to planned admission 1.80, 95% confidence interval (CI) 1.48, 2.19) (Table 2). Other variables which were independently and directly associated with increased hazard were older age, presence of comorbidity, high-grade tumour and more advanced stage; lower hazard was associated with being married, being a private patient, and having cancer sited in the rectum rather than the rectosigmoid junction.

Statistical models of hazard: indirect effects

Increasing affluence, private patient status and married status indirectly reduced the hazard by reducing the rate of emergency admission (Table 3). Private patient status also reduced the hazard through an indirect effect on stage. No other statistically significant indirect effects were seen, and the only significant combined indirect effect (*i.e.*, considering all potential pathways) involved private patient status.

Statistical models of mediating factors

Table 4 shows the multivariate analysis of factors associated with emergency presentation. Factors associated, in multivariate analyses, with a higher rate of emergency presentation were older age, more advanced stage or higher grade of cancer, cancer site in the rectum and residence in the Western region; those associated with a lower risk were being married, being a private patient, residing in the Southern region and (marginally) residence in a less deprived area. Patients first admitted as an emergency were less likely to receive optimal (or more aggressive) treatment or to have their main treatment in a high caseload hospital.

A higher rate of optimal (or more aggressive) treatment was seen in married patients and those with more advanced disease, while a lower rate was seen in patients living in less deprived areas and those who were admitted as an emergency. Treatment in a high caseload hospital was more frequent in patients from less deprived areas and those with more comorbidity, and less frequent in those living in areas

Table 2. Direct effects of patient, cancer and treatment characteristics on hazard ratio

Variable	Value	Hazard ratio (95% confidence intervals)
Emergency admission		
	No	1.00
	Yes	1.80 (1.48, 2.19)
Sex		
	Female	1.00
	Male	1.26 (0.53, 2.98)
Age		
	Per 10 year increase	1.38 (1.25, 1.52)
Age and sex interaction		
	Other	1.00
	Male aged 70+	0.98 (0.85, 1.12)
Deprivation score		
	Per unit score	0.67 (0.39, 1.16)
Marital status		
	Never married	1.00
	Married	0.85 (0.74, 0.98)
Private patient		
	No	1.00
	Yes	0.72 (0.61, 0.84)
HSE area		
	Dublin Mid-Leinster	1.00
	Dublin North-east	1.09 (0.88, 1.36)
	South	1.05 (0.88, 1.25)
	West	1.05 (0.86, 1.28)
Urban/rural residence		
	High	1.00
	Medium	1.14 (0.95, 1.36)
	Low	1.00 (0.84, 1.19)
	Unknown	1.03 (0.80, 1.33)
Tumour grade		
	Low/intermediate	1.00
	High	1.77 (1.45, 2.15)
Stage		
	I/II	1.00
	III/IV	2.86 (2.59, 3.15)
Comorbidities		
	No	1.00
	Yes	1.42 (1.21, 1.66)
Optimal treatment regime		
	No	1.00
	Yes	0.90 (0.77, 1.06)
Hospital caseload		
	0-200 cases/year	1.00

Table 2. Direct effects of patient, cancer and treatment characteristics on hazard ratio (Continued)

Variable	Value	Hazard ratio (95% confidence intervals)
	>200 cases/year	0.90 (0.78, 1.03)
Site		
	Rectosigmoid	1.00
	Rectum	0.84 (0.72, 0.99)
Year of diagnosis		0.92 (0.89, 0.96)

Values in bold denote statistically significant values.

outside the Dublin/Mid-Leinster region or with medium or low population density, and for emergency admissions. Later stage cancers were diagnosed more commonly in patients with high-grade cancers and less frequently amongst older or private patients, or those with one or more comorbid conditions.

Discussion

We have used a relatively novel method, based on the principles of structural equation modelling, which can model direct and indirect effects of prognostic factors on the hazard in a sensitive and time-dependent way. This model is fundamentally different from the classical linear regression model or ANOVA, as it includes structured relationships between variables. Our primary objective was to assess the direct and indirect impacts of socio-economic inequalities—in particular age, deprivation, marital status and possession of private health insurance—on survival from rectal cancer, and the role of emergency presentation in the observed variation in outcomes.

In this large population-based study, 12% of first admissions for diagnosis or treatment of rectal cancer were as an emergency. Apart from cancer stage, emergency admission had the strongest direct effect on poor survival, which makes it particularly important to better understand what influences it and how it inter-relates with other factors that may influence survival. In Ireland, although some of the larger private hospitals have emergency rooms, most emergency admissions will be to public hospitals. However patients with private health insurance who present in this way will be recorded as private patients by the public hospital, so we do not consider that having health insurance, or being a private patient, introduces any bias in the designation of patients as public or private.

We succeeded in estimating and testing a number of indirect effects and showed that emergency admission mediates a significant part of the influence of deprivation, private health insurance and marital status on survival. Emergency presentations pose complex clinical challenges^{11,12}, and are associated with advanced stage and co-morbidity^{4,13–15} and a high rate of post-operative complications.¹⁴ Some of the adverse impact of emergency admission may be mitigated by

Table 3. Indirect effects of affluence, private patient status and marital status on hazard, mediated through cancer and treatment characteristics; coefficients and 95% confidence intervals

Mediated through:	Effect of		
	Affluence	Private patient	Never married
Optimal treatment	0.02 (−0.02, 0.06)	0.00 (0.00, 0.01)	−0.01 (−0.01, 0.00)
High caseload hospital	−0.04 (−0.10, 0.01)	0.00 (−0.01, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)
Late stage	−0.02 (−0.32, 0.28)	−0.14 (−0.22, −0.05)	0.03 (−0.05, 0.11)
Emergency admission	−0.07 (−0.14, −0.01)	−0.04 (−0.05, −0.02)	−0.02 (−0.04, 0.00)
Caseload → treatment	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)
Late stage → optimal treatment	0.00 (−0.03, 0.03)	0.01 (−0.01, 0.04)	0.00 (−0.01, 0.01)
Late stage → high caseload hospital	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)
Late stage → emergency admission	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)
Emergency admission optimal treatment	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)
Emergency admission → high caseload hospital	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)
Late stage → high caseload hospital → optimal treatment	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)
Late stage → emergency admission → optimal treatment	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)
Late stage → emergency admission → high caseload hospital	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)
Late stage → emergency admission → high caseload hospital → optimal treatment	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)	0.00 (0.00, 0.00)
All indirect effects	−0.12 (−0.41, 0.18)	−0.16 (−0.25, −0.08)	0.00 (−0.08, 0.08)
Direct effect	−0.40 (−0.94, 0.15)	−0.33 (−0.48, −0.17)	−0.16 (−0.30, −0.02)
Total effect	−0.51 (−1.11, 0.08)	−0.49 (−0.66, −0.32)	−0.16 (−0.31, 0.00)

Values in bold denote statistically significant values.

admission to a specialist centre which can deal with these complexities, and there may be a case for transfer to a specialist centre for definitive surgery.

Affluence and health insurance had direct effects on survival, independent of any of the other prognostic factors studied. This may be because of residual confounding⁴ due to undetected comorbidity—for instance, the prevalence of smoking and obesity is higher in more deprived populations in Ireland¹⁶. Although our analysis adjusted for comorbidity, this probably does not capture more subtle levels of general unfitness or lifestyle behaviours that are associated with poor survival. As the patients who were never admitted to public hospitals were assigned a co-morbidity score of 0, comorbidity was not fully adjusted for in these patients, which would result in a slight under-estimation of the positive effect of health insurance on survival.

Emergency admission of rectal cancer carries a much higher mortality than planned admission regardless of cancer stage at presentation.^{4,14,17} It is not possible to estimate directly from our data, how many emergency admissions would be “preventable” but as under 6% of private patients in the most affluent areas had emergency admission compared to 20% of public patients in the most deprived areas, a significant number of emergency admissions seems avoidable.

The factors contributing to emergency admission in this study are similar to those associated with diagnostic and treatment delay.^{1,15,18–20} Almost all emergency admissions are likely to have been preceded by symptoms, although in a minority of cases the disease may have been occult prior to presentation.²¹ Any delay, whether due to patient or health system factors,^{22–26} will make progression and emergency admission more likely.

Patients may delay acting on symptoms for reasons which are cultural, attitudinal, financial, social or geographical.^{3,18,22,27,28} Delay and emergency admission may be reduced by programmes of education and information on symptoms. Our finding that emergency admission was more frequent in deprived populations and those living alone points to the importance of social support and easy access to health advice.

The commonest causes of health system delay are late or inappropriate referral by general practitioners and delays in access to investigation (*e.g.*, endoscopy). Although median delays are short relative to the natural history of the disease, patients with very long delays are likely to eventually present as emergencies, with a significant impact on survival. General practitioners have been shown, in a number of countries, to delay before referring patients with symptoms of bowel cancer

Table 4. Regression coefficients (95% confidence intervals) of optimum treatment, caseload, tumour stage and first hospital admission type on explanatory variables

Variable	Values	Emergency admission	Optimum or more aggressive treatment	Main treatment in high caseload hospital	Late stage
Year of diagnosis (per year)		-0.01 (-0.01, -0.01)	0.00 (-0.02, 0.02)		0.00 (-0.02, 0.02)
Sex	Female				
	Male	-0.01 (-0.15, 0.13)	-0.04 (-0.24, 0.16)	0.03 (-0.17, 0.23)	0.27 (-0.14, 0.68)
Age	Per 10 year increase	0.02 (0.00, 0.04)	-0.10 (-0.12, -0.08)	-0.02 (-0.04, 0.00)	-0.05 (-0.09, -0.01)
Age and Sex	Other	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Male aged 70+	0.00 (-0.02, 0.02)	0.01 (-0.03, 0.05)	0.00 (-0.04, 0.04)	-0.03 (-0.09, 0.03)
Deprivation score	Per unit score	-0.12 (-0.24, 0.00)	-0.21 (-0.35, -0.07)	0.40 (0.26, 0.54)	-0.02 (-0.31, 0.27)
Marital status	Never married	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Married	-0.04 (-0.06, -0.02)	0.05 (0.01, 0.09)	-0.01 (-0.05, 0.03)	0.03 (-0.05, 0.11)
Private patient	No	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Yes	-0.06 (-0.08, -0.04)	-0.03 (-0.07, 0.01)	0.02 (-0.02, 0.06)	-0.13 (-0.21, -0.05)
HSE area	Dublin Mid-Leinster	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Dublin North-east	-0.01 (-0.05, 0.03)	0.01 (-0.05, 0.07)	-0.14 (-0.20, -0.08)	-0.11 (-0.23, 0.01)
	South	-0.04 (-0.08, 0.00)	-0.05 (-0.11, 0.01)	-0.13 (-0.19, -0.07)	0.04 (-0.06, 0.14)
	West	0.05 (0.01, 0.09)	0.01 (-0.05, 0.07)	-0.22 (-0.28, -0.16)	0.09 (-0.03, 0.21)
Urban/rural residence	High (urban)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Medium	-0.01 (-0.05, 0.03)	0.01 (-0.05, 0.07)	-0.23 (-0.29, -0.17)	0.02 (-0.08, 0.12)
	Low (rural)	0.02 (-0.02, 0.06)	0.02 (-0.04, 0.08)	-0.31 (-0.35, -0.27)	-0.04 (-0.14, 0.06)
	Unknown	0.02 (-0.02, 0.06)	0.02 (-0.06, 0.10)	-0.29 (-0.37, -0.21)	0.00 (-0.14, 0.14)
Site	Rectosigmoid	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Rectum	0.05 (0.01, 0.09)	-0.22 (-0.26, -0.18)	-0.10 (-0.14, -0.06)	0.06 (-0.02, 0.14)
Tumour grade	Low/intermediate	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	High	0.02 (-0.02, 0.06)	-0.01 (-0.07, 0.05)	0.03 (-0.03, 0.09)	0.47 (0.37, 0.57)
Stage	I/II	0.00	0.00	0.00	
	III/IV	0.03 (0.01, 0.05)	0.03 (0.01, 0.05)	0.01 (-0.01, 0.03)	
Comorbidities	No	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Yes	0.06 (0.02, 0.10)	0.01 (-0.03, 0.05)	0.06 (0.02, 0.10)	-0.10 (-0.20, 0.00)
First admission	Booked		0.00	0.00	
	Emergency		-0.09 (-0.15, -0.03)	-0.03 (-0.09, 0.03)	
Hospital caseload	0-100 cases/year		0.00		
	>100 cases/year		0.02 (-0.02, 0.06)		

Values in bold denote statistically significant values.

for investigation, despite the risks of obstruction, perforation or haemorrhage.^{4,13,14,29} These symptoms (even those which are alarming, such as rectal bleeding) have a low positive predictive value^{30–33} and patients with vague or non-specific symptoms may experience long delays, potentially ending in emergency admission. As private patients in Ireland have a lower GP consultation rate than average, a higher level of use of GP care does not seem to have a major effect on diagnostic delay.¹⁶ It has been suggested that the GP's "gatekeeper" role results in fewer and later referrals of patients with suspect symptoms,^{34,35} and it is reasonable to assume that private health insurance reduces emergency presentation by allowing rapid access by GPs to specialist assessment and endoscopy. Waiting times for endoscopy in Ireland are much shorter for

private patients. At the end of 2014, 4850 public patients (37% of those on the waiting list) had been waiting for >13 weeks for GI endoscopy,³⁶ while waiting times for private endoscopy, urgent or routine, are of the order of a week.³⁷ Public patients with non-threatening symptoms are therefore at higher risk of emergency admission than private patients, who can opt to bypass queues for secondary care.³⁸ However, although emergency admission would be less frequent if doctors referred earlier and more often²⁰ investigation of suspected colorectal cancer is expensive³⁹ and there must be a balance between over-and under-referral. The consequence of more open access may be fewer emergency admissions but higher costs for investigation of the many symptomatic patients who turn out not to have cancer.⁴⁰

References

- Abel GA, Shelton J, Johnson S, et al. Cancer-specific variation in emergency presentation by sex, age and deprivation across 27 common and rarer cancers. *Br J Cancer* 2015;112 Suppl 1:S129–36.
- Downing A, Aravani A, Macleod U, et al. Early mortality from colorectal cancer in England: a retrospective observational study of the factors associated with death in the first year after diagnosis. *Br J Cancer* 2013;108:681–5.
- Zhang J, Fang L, Wu X, et al. Factors associated with delaying medical assessment of patients and impacting the prognosis of rectal cancer. *Eur J Cancer Prev* 2015;Epub 2015;24:391–9. Feb 24.
- McPhail S, Elliss-Brookes L, Shelton J, et al. Emergency presentation of cancer and short-term mortality. *Br J Cancer* 2013;109:2027–34.
- O'Brien K, Comber H, Sharp L. Completeness of case ascertainment at the Irish National Cancer Registry. *Ir J Med Sci* 2014;183:219–24.
- Haase T, Pratschke J. The Pobal HP Deprivation Index. Dublin, Ireland: Haase and Pratschke, 2012.
- Central Statistics Office. Census 2006 Volume 2 - Age and Marital Status [Internet]. Dublin, Ireland: Stationery Office, Dublin, 2007. Available from: <http://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2006reports/census2006volume2-ageandmaritalstatus/>
- NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology: rectal cancer [Internet]. [cited 2015 Aug 24]; Available from: http://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/f_guidelines.asp#site
- Muthén B, Masyn K. Discrete-Time Survival Mixture Analysis. *J Educ Behav Stat* 2005;30:27–58.
- Muthén L, Muthén B. MPlus User's Guide. 5th ed. Los Angeles, CA: Muthén & Muthén, 2007.
- Lewis MA, Hendrickson AW, Moynihan TJ. Oncologic emergencies: Pathophysiology, presentation, diagnosis, and treatment. *CA Cancer J Clin* 2011;61:287–314.
- Mitchell AD, Inglis KM, Murdoch JM, et al. Emergency room presentation of colorectal cancer: a consecutive cohort study. *Ann Surg Oncol* 2007;14:1099–104.
- Thompson MR, Aasiwwe A, Flashman K, et al. Is earlier referral and investigation of bowel cancer patients presenting with rectal bleeding associated with better survival? *Colorectal Dis off J Assoc Coloproctology G B Irel* 2011;13:1242–8.
- Coco C, Verbo A, Manno A, et al. Impact of emergency surgery in the outcome of rectal and left colon carcinoma. *World J Surg* 2005;29:1458–64.
- Hogan J, Samaha G, Burke J, et al. Emergency presenting colon cancer is an independent predictor of adverse disease-free survival. *Int Surg* 2015; 100:77–86.
- Ipsos MRBI. Healthy Ireland Survey. Stationery Office, Dublin, 2015.
- Iversen LH. Aspects of survival from colorectal cancer in Denmark. *Dan Med J* 2012;59
- Forbes LJL, Warburton F, Richards MA, et al. Risk factors for delay in symptomatic presentation: a survey of cancer patients. *Br J Cancer* 2014;111:581–8.
- Gunnarsson H, Ekholm A, Olsson LL. Emergency presentation and socioeconomic status in colon cancer. *Eur J Surg Oncol* 2013;39:831–6.
- Hamilton W. Emergency admissions of cancer as a marker of diagnostic delay. *Br J Cancer* 2012; 107:1205–6.
- Lyratzopoulos G, Saunders CL, Abel GA. Are emergency diagnoses of cancer avoidable? A proposed taxonomy to motivate study design and support service improvement. *Future Oncol* 2014; 10:1329–33. Lond Engl ;-.
- Korsgaard M, Pedersen L, Sørensen HT, et al. Reported symptoms, diagnostic delay and stage of colorectal cancer: a population-based study in Denmark. *Colorectal Dis* 2006;8:688–95.
- Barrett J, Jiwa M, Rose P, et al. Pathways to the diagnosis of colorectal cancer: an observational study in three UK cities. *Fam Pract* 2006;23: 15–9.
- Biswas M, Ades AE, Hamilton W. Symptom lead times in lung and colorectal cancers: what are the benefits of symptom-based approaches to early diagnosis? *Br J Cancer* 2015;112:271–7.
- Hamilton W, Coleman MG, Rubin G. Colorectal cancer. *BMJ* 2013;346:f3172
- Cleary J, Peters TJ, Sharp D, et al. Clinical features of colorectal cancer before emergency presentation: a population-based case-control study. *Fam Pract* 2007;24:3–6.
- Macleod U, Mitchell ED, Burgess C, et al. Risk factors for delayed presentation and referral of symptomatic cancer: evidence for common cancers. *Br J Cancer* 2009;101:S92–101.
- Tomlinson C, Wong C, Au H-J, Schiller D. Factors associated with delays to medical assessment and diagnosis for patients with colorectal cancer. *Can Fam Physician Med Fam Can* 2012;58
- Majumdar SR, Fletcher RH, Evans AT. How does colorectal cancer present? Symptoms, duration, and clues to location. *Am J Gastroenterol* 1999;94: 3039–45.
- Fijten GH, Blijham GH, Knottnerus JA. Occurrence and clinical significance of overt blood loss per rectum in the general population and in medical practice. *Br J Gen Pract J R Coll Gen Pract* 1994;44:320–5.
- Fijten GH, Starmans R, Muris JW, et al. Predictive value of signs and symptoms for colorectal cancer in patients with rectal bleeding in general practice. *Fam Pract* 1995;12: 279–86.
- Thompson, Pond, Ellis, Beach, Thompson. Rectal bleeding in general and hospital practice; "the tip of the iceberg." *Colorectal Dis* 2000;2:288–93.
- Hamilton W, Round A, Sharp D, et al. Clinical features of colorectal cancer before diagnosis: a population-based case-control study. *Br J Cancer* 2005;93:399–405.
- Rose PW, Rubin G, Perera-Salazar R, et al. Explaining variation in cancer survival between 11 jurisdictions in the International Cancer Benchmarking Partnership: a primary care vignette survey. *BMJ Open* 2015;5:e007212.
- Vedsted P, Olesen F. Are the serious problems in cancer survival partly rooted in gatekeeper principles? An ecologic study. *Br J Gen Pract J R Coll Gen Pract* 2011;61:e508–12.
- Health Service Executive. Health Service Performance Assurance Report [Internet]. 2014; Available from: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/corporate/performance-reports/d14par.pdf>
- Irish Health. All hail the mighty waiting list [Internet]. 2011; Available from: <http://www.irishhealth.com/article.html?id=18986>
- Lynch BM, Baade P, Fritschi L, et al. Modes of presentation and pathways to diagnosis of colorectal cancer in Queensland. *Med J Aust* 2007; 186:288–91.
- Bending MW, Trueman P, Lowson KV, et al. Estimating the direct costs of bowel cancer services provided by the National Health Service in England. *Int J Technol Assess Health Care* 2010;26:362–9.
- Thompson MR, Heath I, Ellis BG, et al. Identifying and managing patients at low risk of bowel cancer in general practice. *BMJ* 2003;327:263–5.