

Cancer mortality in Italy, 1970-2002

Matteo Malvezzi^{1,2}, Cristina Bosetti¹, Eva Negri¹, Carlo La Vecchia^{1,2},
and Adriano Decarli^{2,3}

¹Istituto di Ricerche Farmacologiche "Mario Negri", Milan; ²Istituto di Statistica Medica e Biometria "GA Maccacaro", Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan; ³Unità di Statistica Medica e Biometria, Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Nazionale Tumori, Milan, Italy

ABSTRACT

Aims and background. To update previous work on Italian cancer mortality.

Methods. WHO data were used to calculate death rates for 30 cancer sites for 2002. Trends were analyzed with joinpoint regression over the 1970-2002 period.

Results. Total cancer deaths for 2002 in Italy were 163,070 (93,398 men, 69,672 women). Male cancer mortality rose until 1988 and since then has had a 1.4% yearly fall. The first cause of cancer death in males was lung cancer, accounting for 28% of deaths. The decrease in mortality from male lung cancer came about the end of the 1980's (estimated annual percentage change, EAPC, -1.26 from 1989 to 1993 and -2.32 thereafter) and was the main reason for the favorable trends in total male cancer mortality, reflecting the change in smoking prevalence in Italian males. Female total cancer mortality trends have also been favorable, with an overall yearly drop of 1.1% since 1992. The most frequent causes of cancer deaths in females were breast and colorectal cancers, accounting for 16% and 14% of cancer deaths, and both showed declining trends (EAPC, -1.80 since 1992 and -1.51 from 1993 for breast and colorectal cancers, respectively). Female lung cancer has been on the rise (EAPC, 0.82 since 1987) for the last decades due to the rise in cigarette smoking since the 1970's in Italian females.

Discussion. Mortality from the most common cancers in Italy showed a favorable trend over recent years, the maintenance and potential improvement of which would require a strategy focusing on the control of tobacco and alcohol consumption, nutrition and diet. Early diagnosis for selected neoplasms can also have a relevant impact, together with advancements in treatments.

Key words: cancer, epidemiology, Italy, mortality.

Acknowledgments: This study was conducted with the contribution of the Italian League Against Cancer and the Italian Association for Cancer Research. The work of this paper was undertaken while CLV was a senior fellow at the International Agency for Research on Cancer. The authors thank Mrs Ivana Garimoldi for editorial assistance.

Correspondence to: Dr Matteo Malvezzi, Istituto di Ricerche Farmacologiche "Mario Negri", Via Giuseppe La Masa 19, 20156 Milan, Italy.
Tel +39-02-39014669;
fax +39-02-33200231;
e-mail malvezzi@marionegri.it

Received March 7, 2008;
accepted May 28, 2008.