

20 Cancer of unknown primary site

Summary

Relative survival after diagnosis of cancer of unknown primary site is poor when compared with that of other cancer sites. During 1992–1997, relative survival one year after diagnosis was 23.3% for males and 22.5% for females. Five-year relative survival was 13.4% for males and 11.5% for females (Table 20.1). Relative survival ten years after diagnosis was 12.8% for males and 10.7% for females in 1987–1991, the most recent period for which ten-year relative survival data are available (Figure 20.1; Tables 20.2 and 20.3).

Between 1982–1986 and 1992–1997, short-term relative survival in males (up to four years after diagnosis) increased significantly, with relative survival one year after diagnosis increasing from 21.1% to 23.3%. There were no significant changes in long-term relative survival for males. For females, there were no significant changes in relative survival between 1982–1986 and 1992–1997 (Figure 20.1; Tables 20.2 and 20.3).

As age at diagnosis increased, five-year relative survival decreased. In 1992–1997, relative survival was highest for males and females diagnosed between ages 0 and 19 years at 47.2%, and 68.7%, respectively. This declined to 9.9% for males and 5.7% for females aged 80–89 years (Figure 20.2; Table 20.1).

Five-year relative survival increased significantly between 1982–1986 and 1992–1997 for males aged 40–49 years and 60–69 years, by 10.2 percentage points and 3.2 percentage points, respectively. For females, five-year relative survival increased significantly for those aged 60–69 years by 4.1 percentage points (Figure 20.2; Tables 20.5 and 20.6).

Table 20.1: Cancer of unknown primary site: number of new cases and deaths, and five-year relative survival proportions, by age at diagnosis and sex, Australia, 1992–1997

Age	New cases		Deaths		5-year relative survival (%)	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
0–19 years	27	22	14	7	47.2	68.7
20–29 years	45	34	23	24	46.8	29.5
30–39 years	144	174	97	126	32.2	26.6
40–49 years	481	390	365	313	23.9	19.7
50–59 years	1,104	751	924	623	16.7	15.8
60–69 years	2,480	1,629	2,195	1,424	12.2	12.7
70–79 years	2,919	2,457	2,699	2,264	9.9	9.0
80–89 years	1,574	2,105	1,485	2,026	9.9	5.7
90–99 years	192	433	189	423	4.9	7.5
All ages	8,966	7,995	7,991	7,230	13.4	11.5

Incidence and mortality

During 1997, there were 3,139 new cases of cancer of unknown primary site diagnosed. Of these, 1,665 were males and 1,474 were females. Cancer of unknown primary site was the cause of 2,255 deaths in 1997, with 1,171 deaths in males and 1,084 deaths in females. It is estimated that there were about 8,000 years of life lost due to cancer of unknown primary site in males and 5,900 in females during 1997.

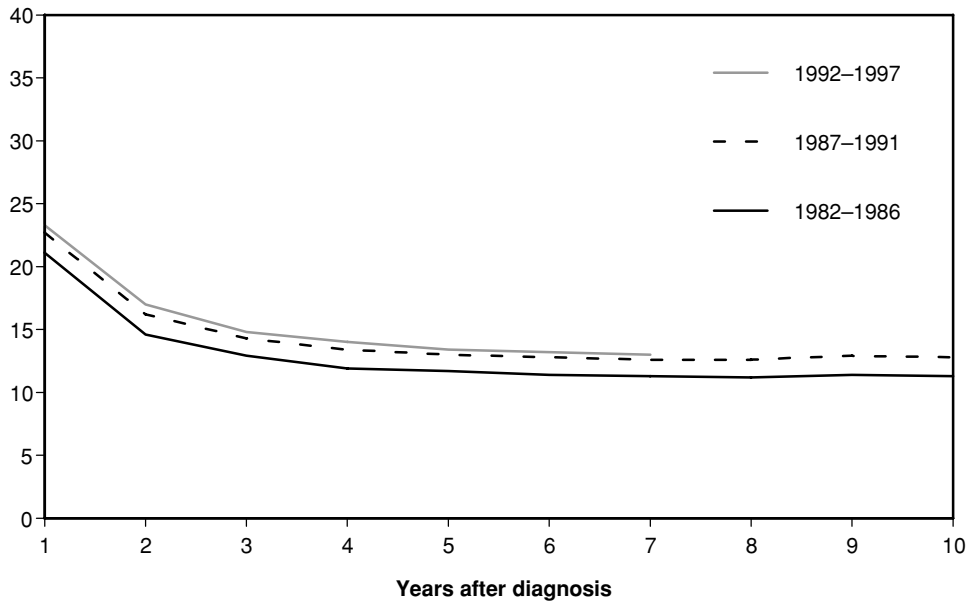
For the six-year period 1992–1997, age-standardised incidence rates for cancer of unknown primary site decreased by 1.3% per annum for males and 1.6% per annum for females. Age-standardised mortality rates for cancer of unknown primary site decreased by 0.7% per annum for males and 1.0% for females.

International comparisons

There were no international comparisons available for cancer of unknown primary site.

Males

Relative survival (%)



Females

Relative survival (%)

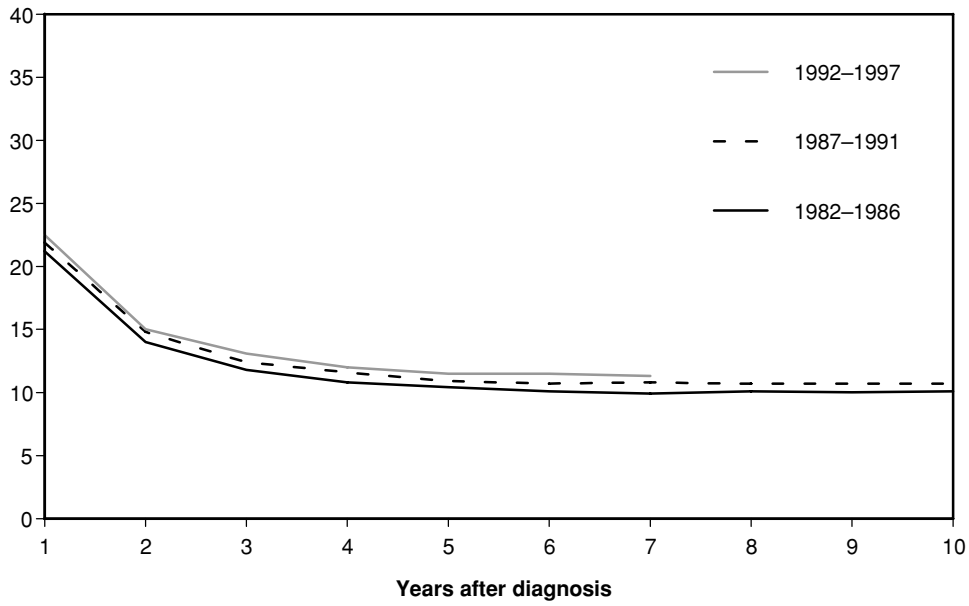
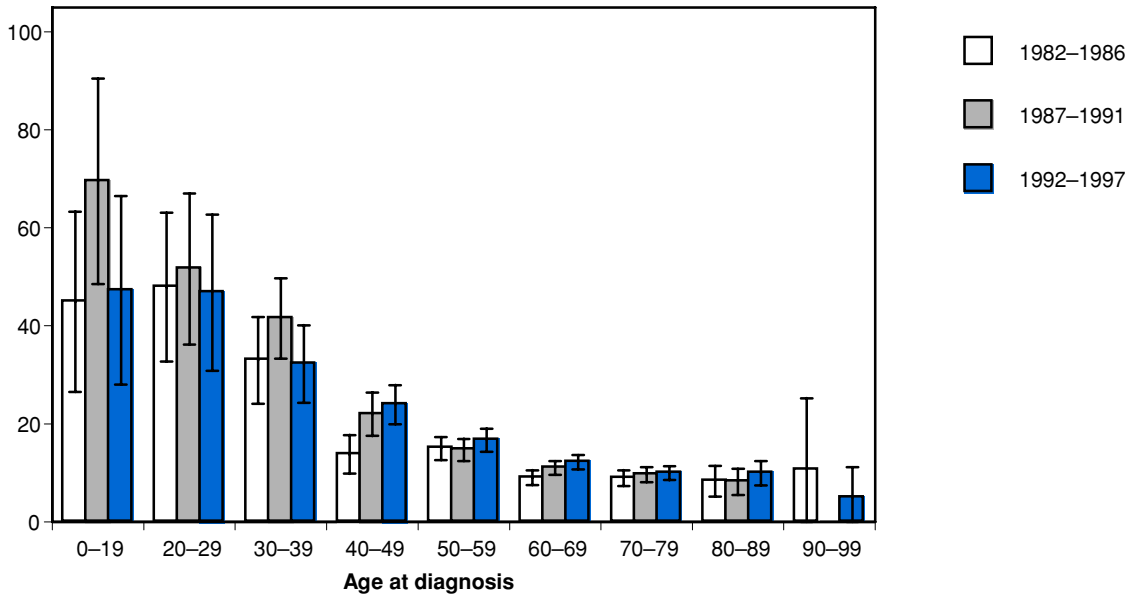


Figure 20.1: Cancer of unknown primary site relative survival proportions: period of diagnosis, Australia

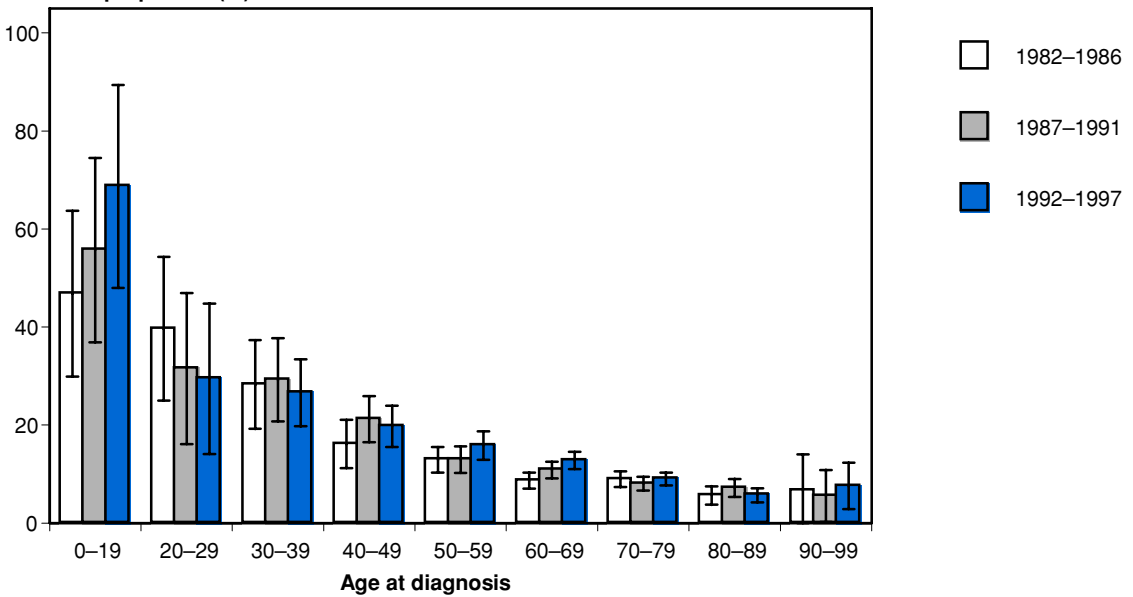
Males

Survival proportion (%)



Females

Survival proportion (%)

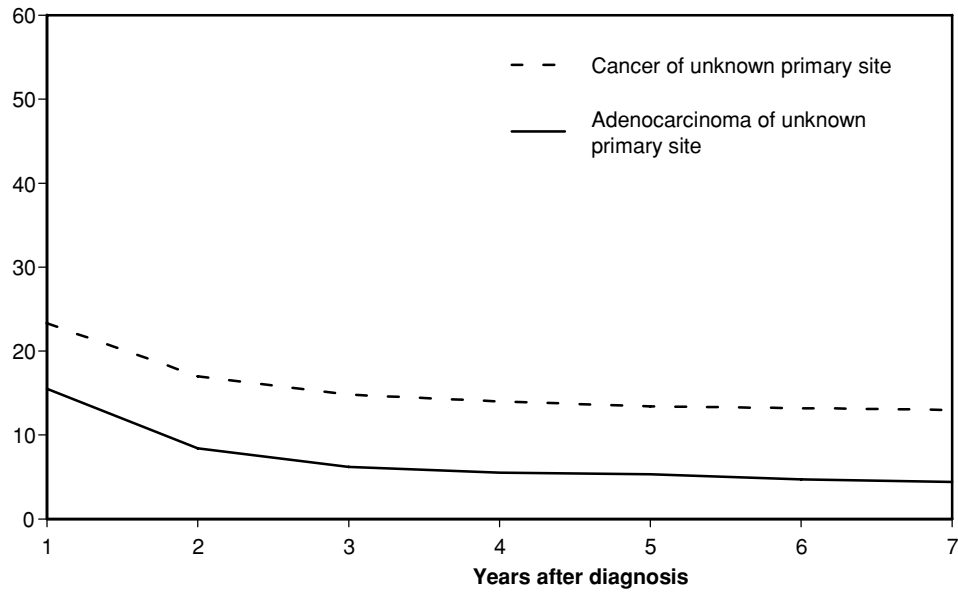


Note: 95% confidence intervals are shown for each age group.

Figure 20.2: Cancer of unknown primary site five-year relative survival proportions: age at diagnosis by period of diagnosis, Australia

Males

Relative survival (%)



Females

Relative survival (%)

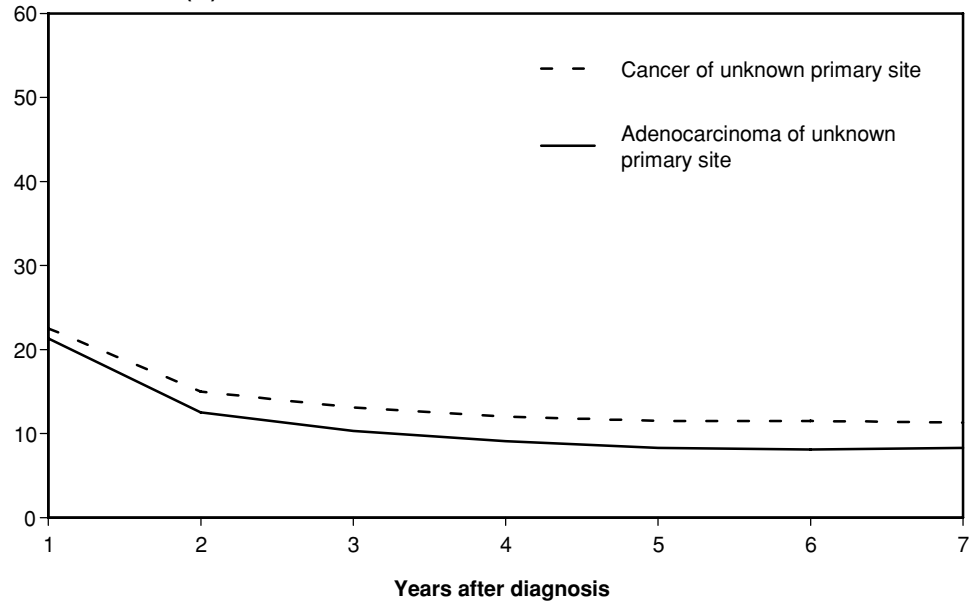


Figure 20.3: Cancer of unknown primary site, adenocarcinoma: relative survival proportions by morphology and period of diagnosis, Australia, 1992–1997

Relative survival by subtypes

Adenocarcinoma of unknown primary site

In 1992–1997, five-year relative survival after diagnosis of adenocarcinoma of unknown primary site was 5.3% for males and 8.3% for females. This was significantly lower than relative survival after diagnosis of all cancers of unknown primary site (Figure 20.3; Tables 20.8 and 20.9).

Five-year relative survival tended to be higher for those diagnosed in the younger age groups (Tables 20.10 and 20.11).