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UK 'not testing enough patients for cancer': Survival rates lagging behind other countries because too few people are being given vital tests

- England performs half as many colonoscopies as Poland for bowel cancer
- Australia and Canada give the test to three times as many people in England
- Wales performed the fewest tests for bowel cancer per head in the UK
- Scottish patients 50 per cent more likely to be tested out than in England
- Fewest tests in England were in West Midlands and the most in North East

By ROSIE TAYLOR FOR THE DAILY MAIL

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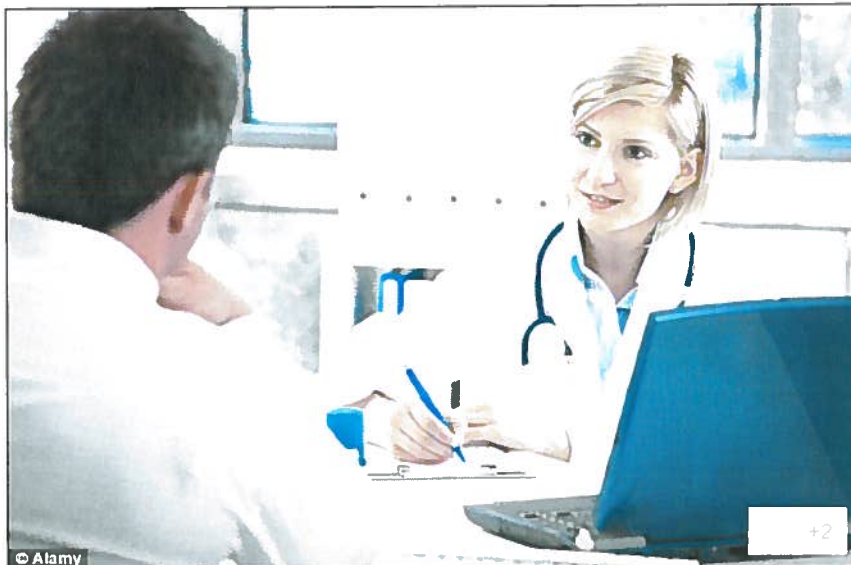
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Cancer survival rates in England are lagging behind other developed countries because not enough patients get crucial tests which could diagnose the disease early, the chief inspector of hospitals said yesterday.

Professor Sir Mike Richards revealed England performs nearly half as many colonoscopies - a test for bowel cancer - as Poland.

Australia and Canada, two of the best performing countries internationally for colorectal cancers, give the test to around three times as many patients per 1,000 people as England.



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Poor survival rates could be down to the low numbers of testing for cancer among patients in the UK, a leading doctor said (file image)

Sir Mike, the government's former national cancer director, said Wales performed the fewest tests per head in the UK, while the West Midlands was the worst area in England and the North East the best. Scottish patients were 50 per cent more likely on average to receive the test than the English, but he

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described this as 'not something to be terribly proud of' as it still performed slightly fewer than Poland.

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Speaking at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) conference in Liverpool, he said: 'One of the reasons (the UK has lower survival rates than other developed countries) probably is that we don't do enough diagnostics.

'There may be overuse of diagnostics in some of these countries, but it's important we benchmark ourselves to see where we are.'

He added: 'I would say the UK woke up late to the problem of cancer. Good progress has been made, particularly since 2000, but we are still not achieving outcomes comparable with the best countries and, if you want to put that even more simply: could do better.'



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Sir Mike cited the differences in care standards across British Hospital and named Wexham Park Hospital in Surrey which was rated poor in most areas when assessed

Britain needs 'better cancer prevention, better earlier diagnosis and more testing of the general public', he said. But problems with getting tests for early diagnosis were not due to 'a lack of will' on the part of GPs but linked to funding restraints.

Sir Mike also said the Care Quality Commission had discovered 'huge variation' between standards of care in hospitals.

He gave the example of Frimley Park Hospital, in Surrey, which was rated good or outstanding on almost every assessment area, and Wexham Park Hospital, just 24 miles away, which was rated poor or needing improvement in most areas.

But he implied patients should not complain about having to travel to get the best treatment.

He told the conference that if he had cancer he 'would want to be treated close to home and at my convenience, but I wouldn't want that to the exclusion of getting the best treatment'.

He added: 'It always amazes me that people are prepared to fly 1,000 miles for a better chance of sunshine on a summer holiday, but they seem to think it's too far to go, to go 50 miles to get the best cancer treatment... I would travel if I had to.'

Survival rates for colorectal cancer in the UK improved from 70 per cent of patients living for at least one year to just under 75 per cent between 1995 and 2007, according to the Lancet.

In contrast, the same figures showed survival rates in Australia were 85 per cent and were 83 per cent in Canada.

Nearly half of patients diagnosed with lung cancer on emergency admission to hospital had been put off going to see their GP, a study presented at the conference found.

Reasons included difficulty making an appointment, being unable to see their usual doctor, not having confidence in their GP and fear of what a doctor would say.

The research, by the London Cancer Alliance and King's College London, found three quarters had see a GP about their symptoms before being admitted, with a third visiting three times.

Around a quarter had been referred to hospital for tests but were hospitalised before the appointment as their condition deteriorated.

Dr Robert Rintoul, chair of NCRI's lung clinical studies group, said: 'If lung cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, patients have a much higher chance of surviving the disease.

'Therefore it's vital that patients recognise possible symptoms early on and are able to get them checked out quickly.'

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