

# Is the incidence of cancer in Malaysia falling?

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The Malaysia National Cancer Registry report 2007-2011 published in 2016 states that for the said five year period the Age-Standardised Rate(ASR) for cancer among males in Malaysia was 89.0.<sup>1</sup> Its breakdown by ethnic groups and sex along with the ASR for cancer in Malaysia between 2003-2005<sup>2</sup> is given in Table I. However, there are no comparisons to previous data in the recent report itself.

**KEY WORDS:**

*Cancer, Incidence, Malaysia*

There appears to be an enormous fall in the incidence of cancer in Malaysia over the last decade. There is an apparent decline of cancer of 36.5% among men and women. This is important because Malaysia might be the only country in the world reporting a declining incidence of cancer in spite of increasing affluence and ageing.

Although the process of data collection is detailed in the recent report, including the means of active search, including case detection from death records, reminders sent to persons in-charge for reporting and registry staff searching relevant hospital records, there is no analysis of the quality control process. Were many reports added from active search and was active search performed across the board in all locations? There appears to be quite a regional difference, with Penang recording a cancer incidence almost twice that of the states with the lowest incidence of cancer. It is stated in the report that there is concern regarding under-reporting in nine new

state cancer registries. It also states that 'more time would be required for (these) registries to mature'.<sup>1</sup>

That is an acknowledgement that the data is inaccurate but we do not know which data is inaccurate and if any of the data is accurate. An analysis of the sources of error may help, but for the time being everybody who would like to quote this important aspect of cancer in Malaysia should be cautious. The Minister of Health has already said regarding the reporting of cancer that "If there is a need to make it compulsory, we may consider legislating it."<sup>3</sup>

We eagerly await good data about the incidence of cancer in Malaysia in order that inaccurate facts will not be quoted in academic literature and that planning for cancer care in Malaysia can be made to meet the need of the population better. The Penang Cancer Registry has to date been the most reliable record of our cancer incidence and its work should continue to be supported and acknowledged. The expertise and practices there can hopefully be spread further.

**REFERENCES**

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**Table I: Age-standardised rate(ASR) for cancer in Malaysia**

	Total		Malays		Chinese		Indians	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
2003-2005	136.9	156.4	89.6	106.4	182.9	201.5	134.4	186.3
2007-2011	86.9	99.3	70.7	81.9	112.9	126.2	70.4	110.1

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