Original article

Breast cancer in younger women in Switzerland 1996–2009: A longitudinal population-based study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Breast cancer (BC) is the most commonly diagnosed cancer and a leading cause of death in younger women.

Methods: We analysed incidence, mortality and relative survival (RS) in women with BC aged 20 –49 years at diagnosis, between 1996 and 2009 in Switzerland. Trends are reported as estimated annual percentage changes (EAPC).

Results: Our findings confirm a slight increase in the incidence of BC in younger Swiss women during the period 1996–2009. The increase was largest in women aged 20–39 years (EAPC 1.8%). Mortality decreased in both age groups with similar EAPCs. Survival was lowest among women 20–39 years (10-year RS 73.4%). We observed no notable differences in stage of disease at diagnosis that might explain these differences.

Conclusions: The increased incidence and lower survival in younger women diagnosed with BC in Switzerland indicates possible differences in risk factors, tumour biology and treatment characteristics that require additional examination.

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Introduction

Breast cancer (BC) is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women, although it is relatively rare in younger women. More than 5000 cases of newly diagnosed BCs occur in Switzerland annually [1]. Approximately 20% of these cases are in women under 50 years old while less than 7% are younger than 40 years [1,2]. Nevertheless, BC is the most common cancer in younger women (more than 40% of all cancers) and a leading cause of cancer death (25% of all cancer deaths) in women under 40 years [2,3].

The overall incidence of BC in Switzerland and other developed countries has decreased by around 2% since around 2003, after...