

TITLE: How do we follow up patients? A pre-trial survey of UK practice.

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ABSTRACT:

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to determine how patients with soft tissue sarcoma are followed up in the United Kingdom to inform the development of a prospective clinical trial.

Methods: A list of clinicians (surgeons and oncologists) treating patients with soft tissue sarcomas in the United Kingdom was compiled and a postal survey performed. Reminders were sent to non-responders. The survey included questions about the specialty of the clinician, the grade, membership of specialist societies, perceptions about risk factors for recurrence and the value of follow up and asked specifically about three clinical scenarios.

Results: Of 192 clinicians who were sent the questionnaire, responses were obtained from 155 (81%). 128 of these met the criteria for analysis. In the given clinical scenarios, length of follow up varied from 1 year to lifelong. The total number of clinic visits in 5 years varied from 5 to 30, of chest radiographs from 0 to 24, of chest CT scans from 0 to 10, and of local site imaging from 0 to 13. 88 (84%) agreed that follow up is of benefit. 57 (59%) agreed that it would be reasonable to follow up selected patients in the community. 96 (93%) agreed that a study of follow up protocols would be of value.

Discussion: There is significant variation in follow-up protocols amongst clinicians in the United Kingdom. A prospective study of follow-up protocols is likely to be supported.