

TITLE: Why do patients with Soft Tissue Sarcoma present so late?

AUTHOR: Johnson GD, Grimer RJ, Smith G, Dramis A

CENTRE: University of Birmingham Medical School, Birmingham

ABSTRACT:

Introduction and Aims: It is well established that Soft Tissue Sarcomas (STS) are more effectively treated in a Specialist Centre (SC). However, delays in time taken for patient to be referred to a SC may lead to a poorer prognosis in patients. This study aims to identify the length of these delays and where they occur.

Patients and Method: Patients with a proven STS were included. Patients were recruited from both outpatient clinics and from the surgical ward of the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital, Birmingham. A structured interview was used to take a detailed history of the patients' treatment pathway before they arrived at the Specialist Centre. Dates were validated using the case notes.

Results: The average time for a patient to present to a SC from onset of symptoms was 112.3weeks (min 3 days, max 1089.3weeks), with a median of 40.4 weeks. Average delay to presentation to a medical professional (patient delay) was 28.6 weeks (min 0, max 674.0), median 1.3 weeks. Average delay in referral to a SC (service delay) was 83.1 weeks (min 0, max 1083.3), median 25.0 weeks.

Discussion: Medical professionals rather than patients contribute the greatest source of delay in patients reaching a SC for treatment of STS. Adherence to previously published guidelines could decrease this delay for diagnosis of possible Sarcoma. Steps should be taken to refer patients directly to a SC if they have symptoms or signs suggestive of STS.