

A plain language summary of:

[Time to surgery following short-course radiotherapy in rectal cancer and its impact on post-operative outcomes. A population-based study across the English NHS, 2009-2014.](#)

B.A.Levick, A.J.Gilbert, K.L.Spencer, A.Downing, J.C.Taylor, P.J.Finan, D.J.Sebag-Montefiore, E.J.A.Morris, *Clinical Oncology* (2019).

What was the study about?

Short course radiotherapy (SCRT) before an operation is an effective treatment for rectal cancer. Previous studies have shown that it reduces the risk of the disease returning in the same location. The recommended gap between completing SCRT and having surgery varies widely, with some studies suggesting that it should be less than four days. This study examined the time between SCRT and surgery and related it to post-operative outcomes up to a year after surgery.

What did we do?

Information was obtained on all rectal cancer patients who underwent surgery and received SCRT in the English NHS between April 2009-December 2014. Post-operative outcomes such as thirty day post-operative mortality, returns to theatre, length of stay and one year survival were investigated in relation to the amount of time between SCRT and surgery. Patients who had a gap of over 27 days were not included in the study.

What did we find?

The study found that although the majority of patients were operated on within seven days of SCRT, there was huge variation across the English NHS. The study did not find any associations between time to surgery following SCRT and surgical outcome.

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