Improved Survival Rates For Lung Cancer Patients Using Advanced Radiotherapy

(PRNewswire) Widespread use of advanced radiotherapy techniques in the Netherlands has resulted in improved survival among elderly lung cancer patients, according to major new research conducted by one of the country's leading cancer centers. VU University Medical Center (VUMC) in Amsterdam, which has now treated more than a thousand patients for pulmonary tumors using stereotactic ablative radiotherapy (SABR) on treatment machines supplied by Varian Medical Systems, publishes its findings in the latest issue of the journal *Annals of Oncology*.

"The greater use of advanced radiotherapy techniques have led to large improvements in survival for Dutch lung cancer patients over the age of 75, many of whom are too frail to undergo surgery," says Dr. Niels Haasbeek from VUMC's department of radiation oncology, who was the first author of the publication. "Those patients in this age group who are fit enough for surgery should also be informed about the curative option of SABR as an alternative to surgery."

Lung cancer is the most common cause of cancer death worldwide, yet improvements in overall survival have been minimal in recent decades: five-year survival for non small-cell lung cancer (NSCLC) was 13 percent in 1975-1977 and had only increased to 16 percent by 1999-2005. Using expertise gained by several years of advanced radiotherapy treatments for early-stage lung cancer patients, clinicians at VUMC embarked on a nationwide study to examine the impact of SABR on survival rates.

SABR, also sometimes referred to as stereotactic body radiotherapy, or SBRT, refers to a method of treating the tumor with a targeted high-energy radiation beam to damage tumor cell DNA and kill the cancer cell. "SABR was first used in the Netherlands at VUMC in 2003, so we used the Dutch National Cancer Registry to examine survival data for three defined periods - the three-year period before it was introduced, the three-year period while it was becoming available at other Dutch centers, and the three years when it was available nationwide," adds Professor Suresh Senan, radiation oncologist at VUMC who led the study based on nationwide data.

"We noted a marked improvement in survival among the nearly 5,000 lung cancer patients aged over 75 who were treated over these nine years." During the period covered by the retrospective study, advanced techniques such as SABR led to radiotherapy use for lung cancer patients increasing from 31 percent to nearly 38 percent and a corresponding increase in survival of nearly 10 months from 16.8 to 26.1 months.

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