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## BMA News

### Letters

Section: Letters  
Issue: 24 May 2003

[back to BMA News homepage](#)

24 May 2003

- » [Search all articles](#)
- » [LMCs conference news](#)
- » [Junior doctors conference news](#)

### [bad news not quite the whole truth](#)

Mark Radcliffe's article on breaking bad news makes assumptions — as most doctors do — that cancer is always bad news, and that the disease is the predominant medical bad news ('The whole truth', May 10, 2003, page 13). Both assumptions are incorrect.

First, more than two-thirds of patients diagnosed with common cancers, such as breast, prostate, colon, cervix and bladder cancers, live more than five years after diagnosis and treatment, according to the Office for National Statistics. Cancer patients who live more than five years following diagnosis and treatment are, in practical terms, considered cured, and are discharged from follow-up.

Second, far more patients die of non-cancer causes than cancer, even though cancer is the second highest cause of mortality.

Providing accurate clinical information and avoiding prejudices is as important as the skill of breaking bad news. Perhaps the cardinal rule is: don't break bad news if you don't know about it.

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