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**CANCER SCORING TO PREDICT HOW LONG YOU MAY LIVE**  
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Doctors have developed a scoring system that can give cancer patients a reliable idea of how long they have left to live.

The aim is to help the terminally ill and their carers to plan for the future.

A study of more than 1,000 patients found the system was at least as accurate as clinicians at predicting whether they were likely to survive for days, weeks or months.

Dr Paddy Stone, from St George's, University of London, said: 'Patients with advanced cancer and their carers often wish to know how long they have left to live.

'Accurate information can allow patients adequate time to prepare for their impending death.'

The information is also important for planning appropriate medical care.

Clinicians' predictions of survival are the mainstay of current practice, but can be unreliable, over-optimistic and subjective, say the researchers.

So Dr Stone's team set out to develop a scoring system for use in patients with advanced cancer in different care settings that was as good, or better, than clinicians' best predictions.

The study, published online in the British Medical Journal, involved 1,018 patients with advanced incurable cancer who were no longer receiving treatment and had recently been referred to palliative care services across the UK.

Using a combination of clinical and laboratory tests, the team created two scores, known as PiPS-A and PiPS-B, to predict whether patients were likely to survive for up to 13 days, between 14 and 55 days, or more than this.

They compared the results with actual survival and clinicians' predictions.

Both scores were at least as accurate as a clinician's estimate.

PiPS-B, which required a blood test, was significantly better than an individual doctor's or nurse's prediction.

However, neither scale was significantly more accurate than a multi-professional estimate of survival.

The researchers say further work is needed before the scales can be recommended for use in routine clinical practice.

Dr Paul Glare, of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre in New York, reviewed the findings for the journal and says prognostic tools can help, but should not be applied blindly.

Dr Glare pointed out that 'communicating the prediction to the patient is as important as forecasting it'.

The system has been welcomed by Cancer Research UK.

The charity's Liz Woolf said: 'Although this scale would provide an indication rather than definite information on how long cancer patients have left to live, it could prove useful to patients, families and clinicians who are wondering whether to begin discussions around palliative care.

'Often this conversation is left until it is too late to make arrangements while patients wait to know what their prognosis is.

'Having the conversation at an earlier point will make it more likely that those who want to die at home will be able to do so.'

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**Big C last days test**  
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DOCTORS have developed a scoring system that tells incurable cancer sufferers how long they have left to live.

They say the accurate information will help patients and their families plan for their last days at a difficult time.

The system uses factors such as age, gender and diagnosis to predict survival times.

The docs who devised it say it is more reliable than a cancer expert's estimate on its own.

Dr Paddy Stone, of St George's, University of London, said: "Patients with incurable cancer want to be given accurate information."