INTRODUCTION
The notion of incurable cancers as 'chronic diseases' patients may live with for a long time is increasingly being put forward in society and in the scientific literature. But – how long do cancer patients actually live with their cancer, if they die from it?

STUDY AIM
To investigate cancer patients’ survival from the time of diagnosis until death, if death was caused
• for the cohort as a whole
• according to cancer type

METHOD
A population based cohort study using record linkage between The Danish Register of Causes of Death and the Cancer Registry. Included were all deceased in Denmark during 2012-2014 with cancer registered as their cause of death – who also had a prior diagnosis of cancer. Survival time from diagnosis to death overall, and in relation to cancer type, and age at the time of death is presented using descriptive statistics.

For people with more than one cancer diagnosis, the survival time was calculated using the date of the latest cancer.

RESULTS
• 46,269 people died from cancer during 2012-2014 in Denmark
• 43,281 people (47% women) were included in the cohort, because they were previously registered in the Cancer Registry with a cancer diagnosis
• 84% with one cancer-diagnosis
• 14% with two cancer-diagnoses.

The median survival time from diagnosis to death in the cohort was 345 days (p25/p75; 95/991 days)

• 32% survived 2 years
• 23% survived 3 years
• 17% survived 4 years
• 14% survived 5 years

Table 1-3 show the survival time (ST) in 16 different cancer types, divided into three categories according to the length of their median ST;
Category 1 – median ST less than 1 year
Category 2 – median ST from 1 to 2 years
Category 3 – median ST longer than 2 years

In each table, the cancers are ranked according to the median ST.

CONCLUSION
This population-based cohort study showed that more than half of all cancer patients, who die from cancer, had lived less than one year after they were diagnosed – and almost 7 out of 10 lived less than two years after the diagnosis.

The association between cancer type – incurability – and survival time is important knowledge in the planning of rehabilitation and palliative care initiatives – and also in the public mention of cancer as a disease ‘you can live with for a long time’.

It ‘a long time’ or ‘a chronic disease’ is perceived to surpass ‘two years’ – the results from this study cannot support this perception for most patients with incurable cancer.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS - The author has nothing to declare