Access to Treatment and Educational Inequalities in Cancer Survival*

Jon H. Fiva, Torbjørn Hægeland, Marte Rønning and Astri Syse

June 1, 2012

Work in progress, please do not cite or quote without permission

Abstract

The public health care systems in the Nordic countries provide high quality care (almost) free of charge for all citizens. However, social inequalities in health persist, and previous research has, for example, documented pronounced educational inequalities in cancer survival. In this paper we investigate to what extent this may be driven by differential access to treatment. We document that the probability of receiving treatment at specialized hospitals depends strongly on patients' level of education. Quasi-experimental evidence based on the establishment of regional cancer wards shows that i) highly educated individuals had better access to specialized treatment under the very centralized organization of cancer care that existed up to the mid 1980s and ii) access to specialized treatment improved these patients' chances for surviving cancer. Hence, at least some of the difference between educational groups in cancer survival may arise from quality differences in the treatment they obtain, even in an egalitarian welfare state.

JEL codes: I10, I20

*We are grateful to Kjell Gunnar Salvanes for helpful comments and suggestions. Some of the data in this article are from the Cancer Registry of Norway. The Cancer Registry of Norway is not responsible for the analysis or interpretation of the data presented.

†Department of Economics, BI Norwegian Business School, E-mail: jon.h.va@bi.no
‡Statistics Norway, Research Department, E-mail: thd@ssb.no
§Statistics Norway, Research Department, E-mail: mro@ssb.no
¶Norwegian Social Research, E-mail: astri.syse@nova.no