

Eric A. Finkelstein¹, Yin Bun Cheung¹, Ravindran Kanesvaran², Chetna Malhotra¹, Matthew Chau Hsien Ng², Gee Chuan Wong³, Drishti Baid¹, Lai Heng Lee³ and SHAPE Team

¹Duke-NUS Medical School, Singapore, ²National Cancer Centre Singapore, ³Singapore General Hospital, Singapore

BACKGROUND

- Internationally, less than half of terminally ill cancer patients accurately understand their prognosis, with most being overly optimistic about their chances of cure (Chen et al. 2016, Enzinger et al. 2015, Weeks et al. 2012).
- Whether this is true in Singapore remains unknown.

AIMS & HYPOTHESES

Aims

To quantify perceived prognosis among advanced cancer patients and examine how this correlates with hope.

Hypotheses

- Many patients will be unrealistically optimistic about their prognoses.
- Patient's reported hope will be positively correlated with their estimates of expected survival.

METHODS

Participants

- 200 patients with Stage IV solid cancer, advanced leukaemia or lymphoma.
- Age 21 years or above.
- Aware of cancer diagnosis and stage.
- Prognosis of ≤ 1 year as determined by their treating physicians.

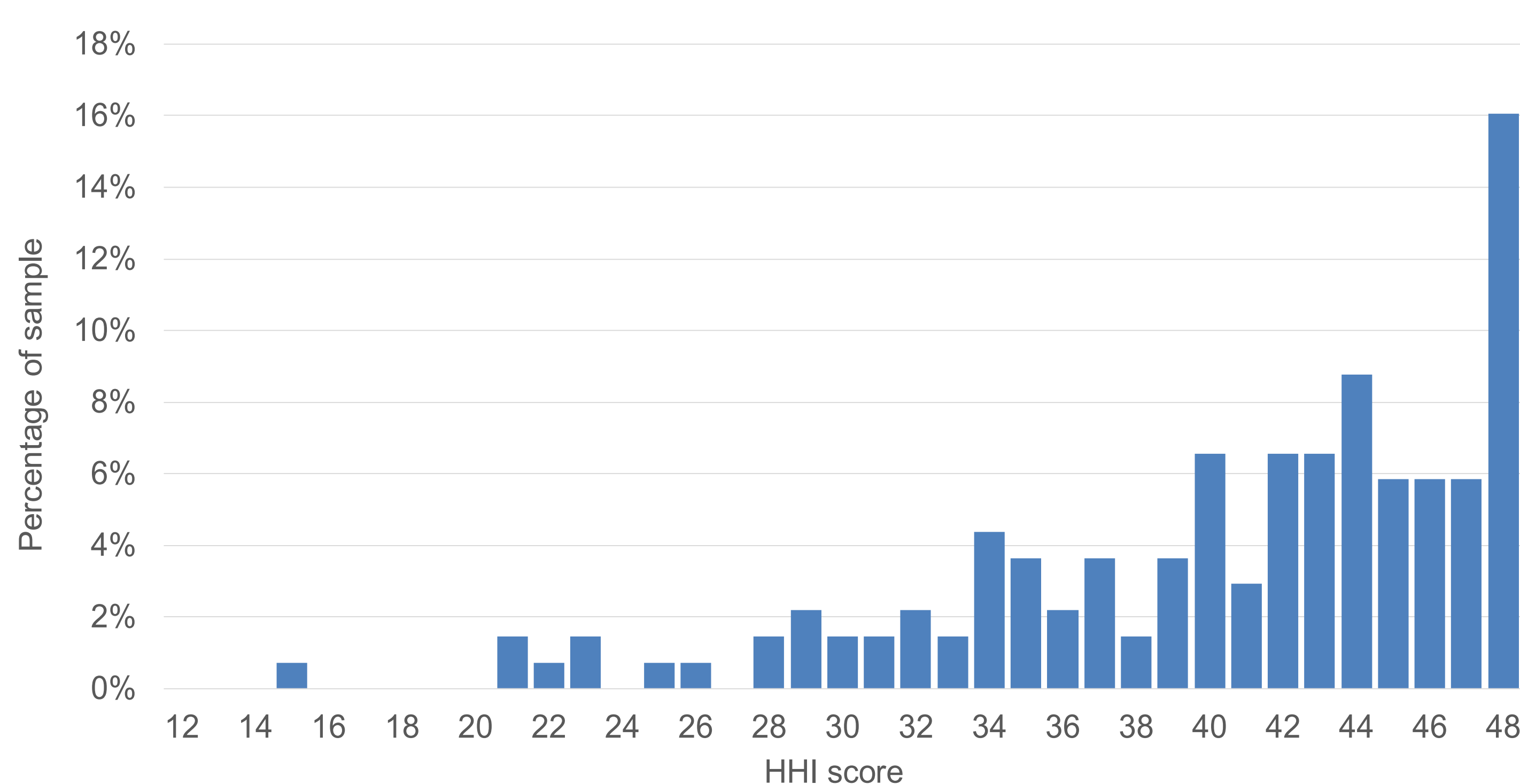
Analysis

Linear correlation (Pearson's r) was used to examine the association between hope and expected survival.

RESULTS

- Mean age for patients: 64 years.
- 71% males.
- 83% married.
- Ethnic composition: Chinese (77%), Malay (12%), Indian (7%), Others (4%).
- Patients reported hope is high. Median hope score was 42, mean hope score was 40.3 (SD: 7.2) (Fig. 1) on a scale of 12 (least hopeful) to 48 (most hopeful).

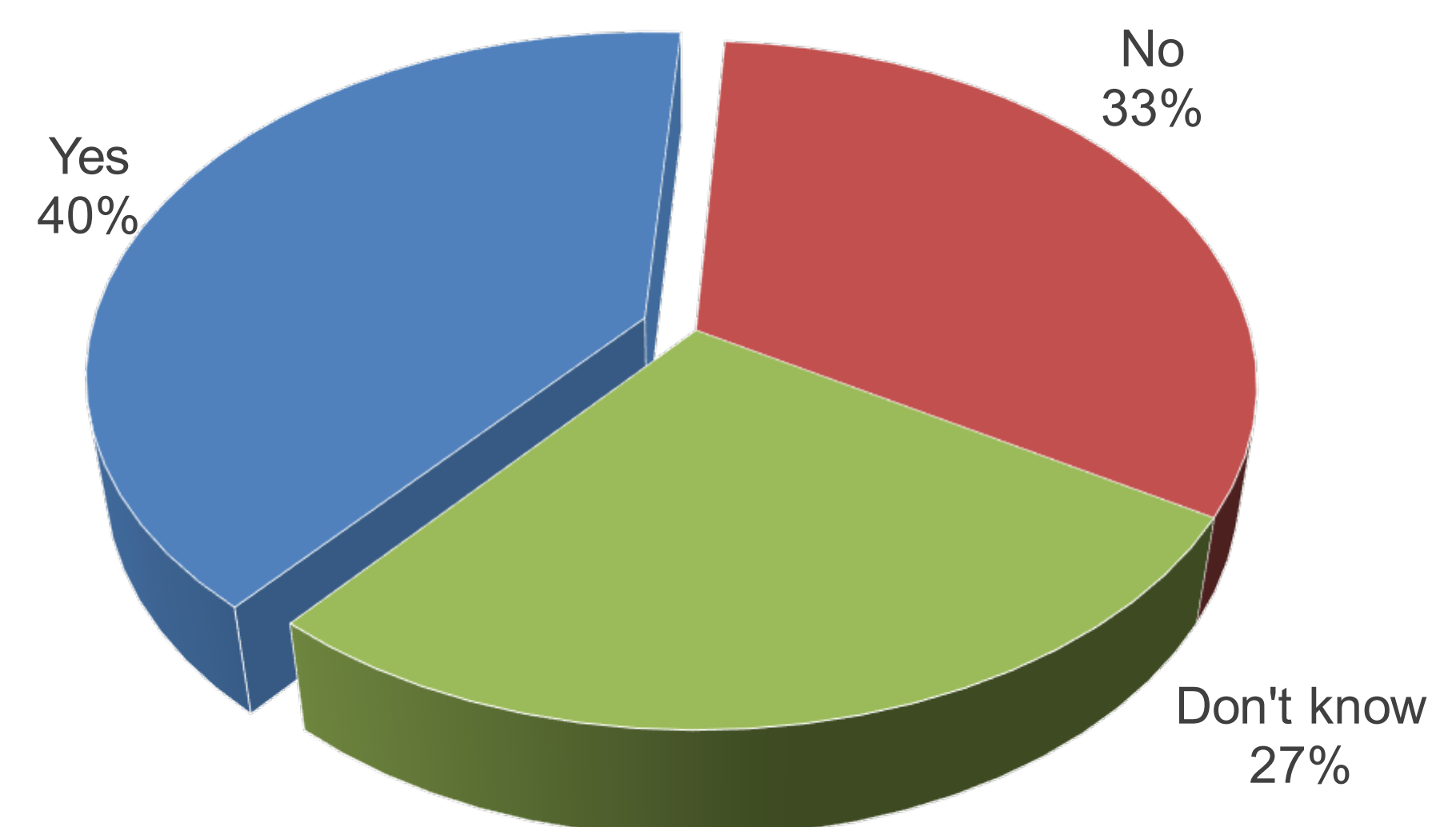
Figure 1. Distribution of patient-reported scores on Herth Hope Index (n = 138)



RESULTS (contd.)

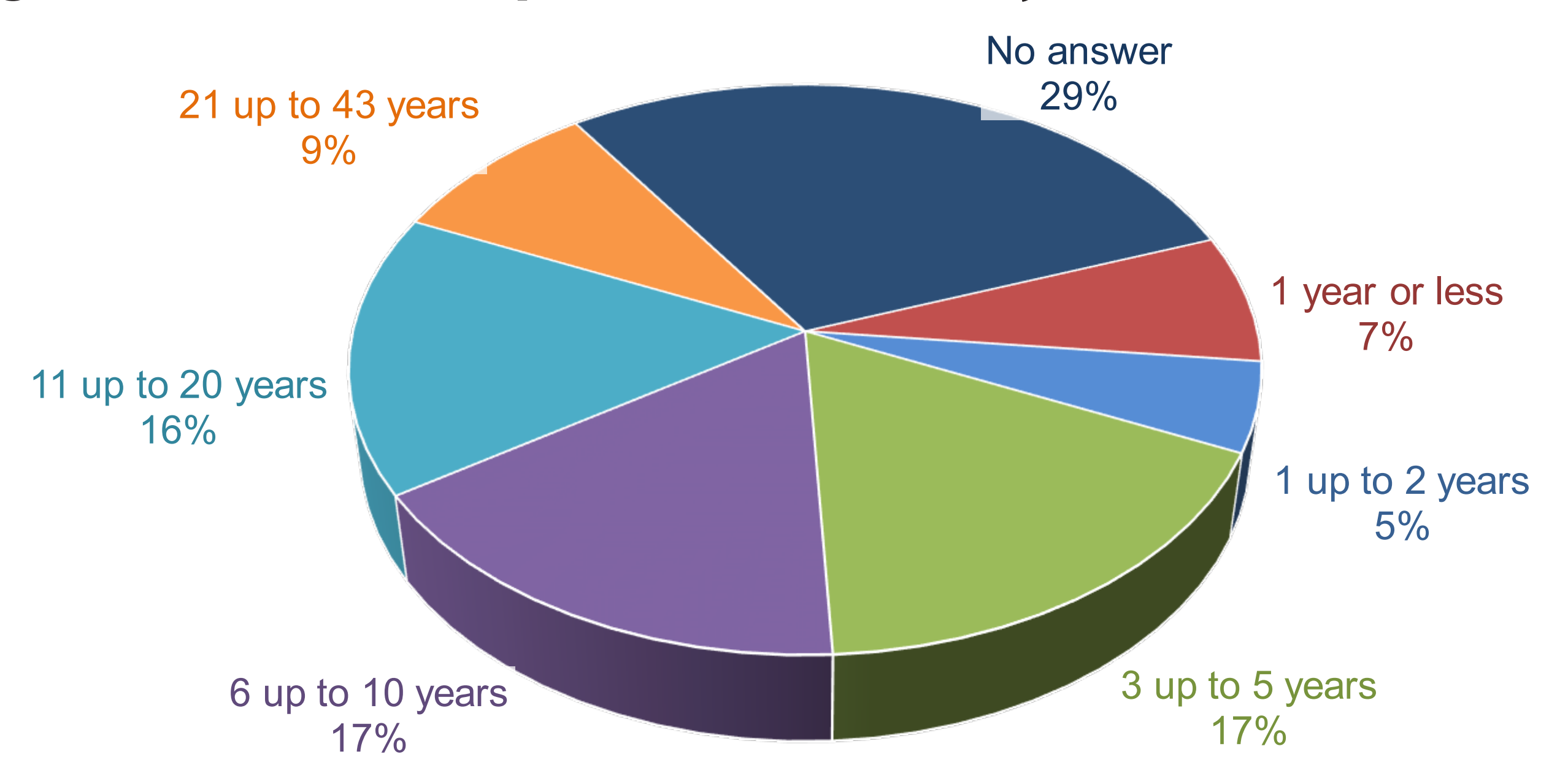
Figure 2. Perceived curability (n = 138)

Do you believe that your current treatment regimen will cure your illness?



Over one third of patients wrongly believe their illness is curable.

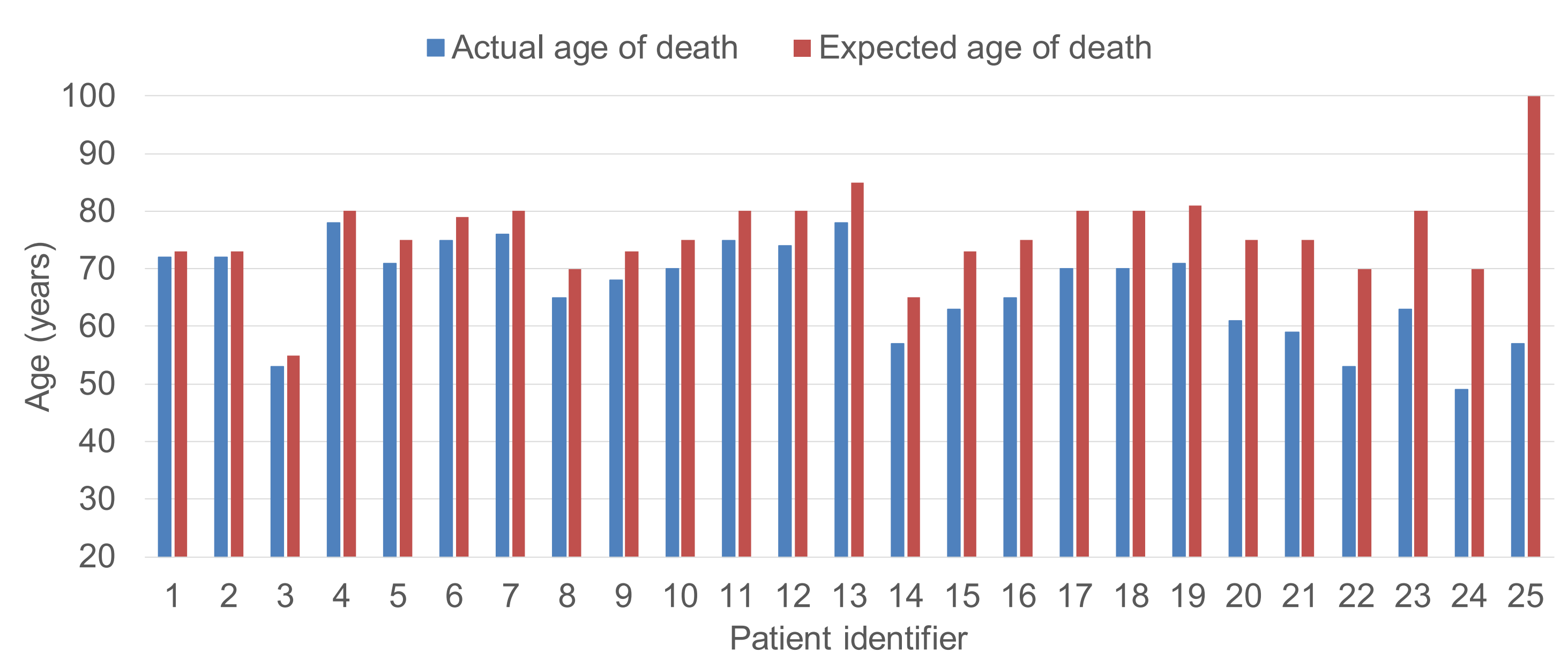
Figure 3. Patients' expected survival in years (n = 138)



Although physicians estimate patients' prognosis to be 1 year or less, median expected survival among patients is high (8 years) and dispersed (SD: 9.8 years).

Over half of patients are unrealistically optimistic about their prognoses compared to their physician's estimate.

Figure 4. Expected age vs. Actual age of death among deceased patients (n = 25)



Every deceased patient overestimated their expected survival. Median over-estimation was 7 years. Patients expected survival is positively correlated with their reported hope (Pearson's $r = 0.26$; $p < 0.01$).

CONCLUSIONS

- Results suggest that many advanced cancer patients are hopeful and overly optimistic about their prognoses. These beliefs could contribute to over-treatment and/or misinformed treatment decisions.
- Patients who are more hopeful appear to have longer expected survival.
- Future research should identify strategies that can improve patients acceptance and understanding of prognostic information.