



# Does enhanced recovery improve the survival rates of patients 3 years after undergoing surgery to remove a tumor in the colon?

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## Abstract

**Purpose** The advantages of enhanced recovery programs (ERP) after colorectal surgery for morbidity and length of stay are well known. On a longer term, evidence is much more limited. The aim of this study is to determine the impact of ERP on survival after 3 years of follow-up, following colorectal cancer surgery.

**Methods** All the patients undergoing resection for colorectal cancer between the years 2010 and 2014 were included. Patients were classified according to their compliance with the ERP (< 70 or ≥ 70%).

**Results** Among the 206 patients included during the period, 129 were male (62.6%). The 3-year overall survival rate was 70.4% (145 patients) and relapse-free survival was 59.2% (122 patients). The survival after 3 years was influenced by the initial metastatic status ( $p < 0.0001$ ), operative morbidity ( $p < 0.001$ ), and the presence of peritumoral emboli ( $p = 0.006$ ). However, the compliance with the ERP ≥ 70% did not influence overall survival ( $p = 0.63$ ), nor relapse-free survival ( $p = 0.93$ ). The same observations were found among the “at-risk” population (synchronous metastasis and postoperative complication).

**Conclusion** The ERP does not seem to influence the 3-year relapse-free survival after colorectal resection for cancer.

**Keywords** Enhanced recovery · Colorectal cancer · Global survival · Disease-free survival

## Introduction

Bowel resection surgery is common, with 40,000 colon resection procedures every year in France, 70% of which are aimed at removing cancer [1]. The outcomes of this surgery, which initially had a morbidity rate of 2 to 20%, of which 2 to 6% concerned fistulas, have changed thanks to enhanced recovery

after surgery (ER) programs that were introduced in the 1990s by H. Kehlet [2]. Their many short-term, postoperative benefits are well known, such as reduced morbidity, mortality, time spent in hospital, and cost of treatment [3–5]. In fact, the literature reports that hospitalization periods have reduced by 2.94 days and the cost of treatment per patient has reduced by 1600 euros [6], as well as a 50% reduction in morbidity (CI [0.35; 0.72]) by reducing the rate of readmissions from 22 to 9% [3, 4, 7, 8].

The longer-term benefits are still under review. These programs, which were initially developed for bowel surgery, reduced postoperative immunodepression and inflammation [9–11]. This could also be beneficial for cancer surgeries as it reduces the risk of relapse in the medium to long-term. As far as we know, there are currently only two studies that report the long-term benefits. Gustafsson et al. [12] also concluded that 70% compliance with ER programs could reduce the risk of death after 5 years with a hazard ratio (HR) of 0.58 (95% confidence interval (95% CI) = 0.39–0.88). Furthermore, Curtis et al. [13] note that a combined approach of a laparoscopy and an ER program would increase the chances of survival after 5 years with an HR of 1.55 (95% CI = 0.16–2.06).

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Therefore, improving the chances of long-term survival could be added to the many advantages of ER programs and provide new arguments in favor of extending these programs to other areas in current practice. However, there are not enough of these high-quality studies, which still need to be verified on other sample groups.

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of following a postoperative enhanced recovery program on surviving 3 years after surgery.

The secondary objectives were to evaluate the impact that following an ER program has on survival without relapse for 3 years after surgery, to evaluate the factors influencing survival for 3 years after surgery, and to evaluate the impact of ER programs on at-risk groups.

## Equipment and method

### Patients

This monocentric, retrospective study included all patients who underwent a colectomy as a result of cancer in the visceral surgery department of our university hospital. The colectomy may have been a scheduled surgery or an emergency procedure. The cancer diagnosis was confirmed by the anatomic pathology department. The inclusion period was from January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2014. The list of patients was taken from the hospital's encrypted electronic database.

Patients were excluded if they did not meet our inclusion criteria, declined to participate in the study, or did not have a follow-up after 3 years (Fig. 1).

The design of this study was approved by our local ethics committee and the database is registered with the *Commission Nationale de l'Informatique et des Libertés* (CNIL—National Commission for Informatics and Liberties) under the number 2017-MR-03-11.

### Methodology

The main evaluation criterion was overall survival for 3 years and was defined by whether the patient was living or deceased 3 years after surgical treatment.

The secondary evaluation criterion was survival without relapse for 3 years, defined by the date of relapse assessed by a CT scan of the thoracic, abdominal, or pelvic regions carried out every 6 months, as recommended by the *Fédération Française de Cancérologie Digestive* (French Federation for Digestive Oncology) [14].

Data concerning survival, relapses, and the date and cause of death was immediately recorded in files when it became available or was gathered by telephone from the patients' general practitioners, oncologists, or gastroenterologists.

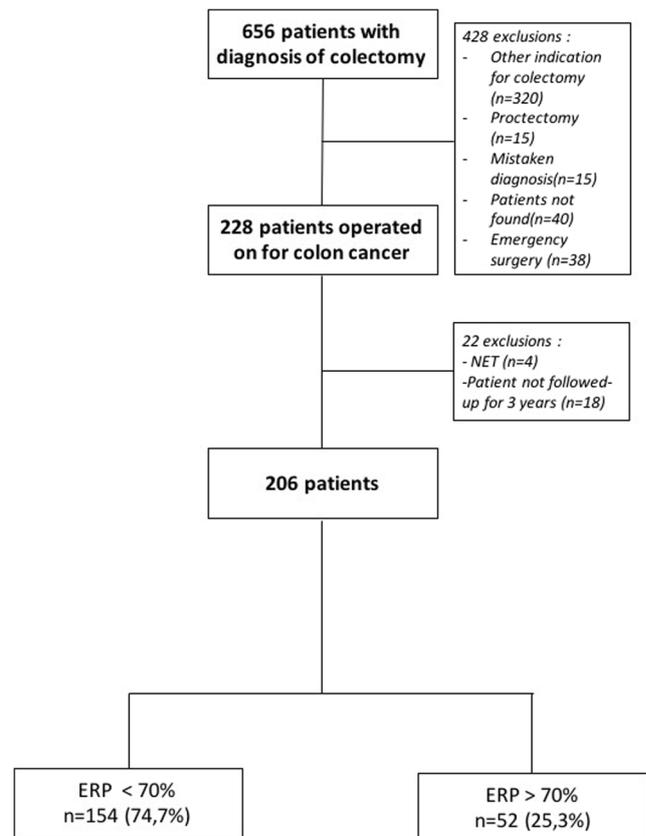


Fig. 1 Flow-chart of our population. NET, neuroendocrine tumor

### Data

The following data was collected:

- Demographic information such as age, sex, body mass index (BMI), medical history, American Society of Anesthesiology (ASA) score, and use of anticoagulants.
- Surgical data such as the surgical approach and type of surgery.
- Anatomic pathology data such as the quality of resection (R status), the presence of peritumoral emboli or perineural invasions, and the status of microsatellite instability (MSI).
- Short- and medium-term follow-up: postoperative morbidity, compliance with enhanced recovery programs, date of relapse, and date of death.

Postoperative morbidity was defined as anything other than normal and expected outcomes that occurred within 30 days of surgery. Complications that were not directly linked to surgical procedures were classed as medical complications.

### Perioperative care

An ER program was introduced into the department in June 2012. It follows the recommendations of the *Société*

*Française de Chirurgie Digestive* (SFCD—French Society of Digestive Surgery) and the French Society of Anesthesia & Intensive Care Medicine (SFAR) [15].

In order to assess compliance, the percentage of compliance was calculated using the data recorded in Table 1 (number of items followed/number of markers ( $n = 13$ )).

The literature concludes that enhanced recovery programs are considered to have been followed if at least 70% of the recommendations were followed, which could result in reduced morbidity and mortality by decreasing the instances of postoperative ileus [16]. Thus two groups were defined based on this 70% threshold:

- Enhanced recovery program in which more than 70% is followed ( $n = 52$ ). This means that adherence to the different criteria chosen by SFAR and SFCD, according to current recommendations, was higher than 70%.
- Enhanced recovery program in which less than 70% is followed ( $n = 154$ ). This means that adherence to less than 70% of the different, recommendations stated above was observed.

## Statistical analysis

Qualitative variables were recorded as percentages and compared using a Chi<sup>2</sup> test or Fisher's exact test. Quantitative variables were recorded as averages (+/− standard deviation) and compared using the Student's *t* test or the Mann-Whitney *U* test.

The survival rates of the different groups were compared using the logrank test and were represented by Kaplan-Meier's survival curve.

A value of  $p < 0.05$  was considered significant.

## Results

Two hundred six patients were included in the study, 129 of whom were men (62.6%). Average body mass index and age

were 26.7 kg/m<sup>2</sup> ( $\pm 5.5$ ) and 70.9 years ( $\pm 12.1$ ), respectively. One hundred four patients had a right hemicolectomy (50%) and 90 had a left hemicolectomy or a sigmoid colectomy (43.7%).

## Factors influencing survival

In our sample group, demographic characteristics were not associated with survival 3 years after surgery (Table 2).

On the other hand, factors that did influence survival 3 years after surgery included the stage of the tumor ( $p < 0.0001$ ) and the presence of synchronous metastases ( $p < 0.0001$ ) or peritumoral emboli ( $p = 0.006$ ). Perineural invasions were more common in patients who did not survive the 3 years (43.75 vs 26.09%), but the difference was not significant ( $p = 0.08$ ). The short-term outcomes of surgery, and morbidity in particular, were equally linked to a reduced survival rate in the 3 years after surgery ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Relapses after 1, 2, and 3 years were associated with reduced survival rates in the 3 years after surgery ( $p < 0.0001$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ , and  $p < 0.0001$ , respectively) (Table 3).

## Comparison of the groups ER < 70% and ER ≥ 70%

There were no differences in demographics or characteristics of the tumors between the two groups (Table 4). Table 5 records postoperative morbidity within the two groups. In the short term, a reduction in the average period of hospitalization was observed in the group  $\geq 70\%$  (15.7 days ( $\pm 10$ ) vs 12.2 days ( $\pm 12$ ) ( $p = 0.047$ )). Furthermore, overall morbidity and the rate of postoperative anastomotic fistulas were not significantly impacted by the ER program ( $p = 0.34$  and  $p = 0.83$ , respectively). There were fewer medical complications in the sample group ER  $\geq 70\%$  (9.6%) compared to the group ER < 70% (20.9%), but this was not significant ( $p = 0.07$ ).

The length of hospitalization was significantly longer in the group ER < 70% than in the group ER  $\geq 70\%$  ( $p = 0.047$ ).

**Table 1** Enhanced recovery program implemented in our department

| Preoperative                                      | Intraoperative                      | Postoperative   |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| Patient information <sup>a</sup>                  | Laparoscopy <sup>a</sup>            | Premature removal of the urinary catheter <sup>a</sup>                |
| No extended fasting period <sup>a</sup>           | Prevention of nausea                | Removal of the nasogastric tube in the operating theater <sup>a</sup> |
| No bowel preparation <sup>a</sup>                 | No drain <sup>a</sup>               | Mobilization at day 0 <sup>a</sup>                                    |
| Preoperative intake of carbohydrates <sup>a</sup> | Multimodal analgesia                | Premature removal of catheter <sup>a</sup>                            |
| No systematic premedication                       | Personalized fluid replacement plan | Respiratory stimulation   |
| Immunonutrition                                   | Prevention of hypothermia           | Thromboprophylaxis <sup>a</sup>                                       |
|   | Dexamethasone                       |   |

<sup>a</sup>Data retained to assess compliance with enhanced recovery

**Table 2** Surviving 3 years after surgery according to demographic information, medical history, and treatments

|                            | Surviving 3 years ( <i>N</i> = 145) |                                      | Not surviving 3 years ( <i>N</i> = 61) |                                      | <i>p</i> value |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|----------------|
|                            | Mean/<br>actual                     | Standard<br>deviation/<br>percentage | Mean/<br>actual                        | Standard<br>deviation/<br>percentage |                |
| Age                        | 70.5                                | 12.5                                 | 71.9                                   | 11                                   | 0.44           |
| BMI                        | 27.2                                | 5.8                                  | 25.8                                   | 5.1                                  | 0.21           |
| Sex                        |                                     |                                      |  |                                      |                |
| Female                     | 64                                  | 44.1%                                | 23                                     | 37.7%                                | 0.44           |
| Male                       | 81                                  | 55.9%                                | 38                                     | 62.3%                                |                |
| Diabetes                   |                                     |                                      |  |                                      |                |
| Present                    | 25                                  | 17.4%                                | 10                                     | 16.4%                                | 1.00           |
| Absent                     | 119                                 | 82.6%                                | 51                                     | 83.6%                                |                |
| Dyslipidemia               |                                     |                                      |  |                                      |                |
| Present                    | 32                                  | 22.2%                                | 17                                     | 27.9%                                | 0.47           |
| Absent                     | 112                                 | 77.8%                                | 44                                     | 72.1%                                |                |
| ASA score                  |                                     |                                      |  |                                      |                |
| 1                          | 21                                  | 14.5%                                | 4                                      | 6.6%                                 | 0.23           |
| 2                          | 69                                  | 47.6%                                | 26                                     | 42.6%                                |                |
| 3                          | 54                                  | 37.2%                                | 30                                     | 49.2%                                |                |
| 4                          | 1                                   | 0.7%                                 | 1                                      | 1.6%                                 |                |
| Hypertension (HTN)         |                                     |                                      |  |                                      |                |
| Present                    | 65                                  | 44.8%                                | 27                                     | 44.2%                                | 1.00           |
| Absent                     | 80                                  | 55.2%                                | 34                                     | 55.8%                                |                |
| COPD                       |                                     |                                      |  |                                      |                |
| Present                    | 6                                   | 4.2%                                 | 2                                      | 3.3%                                 | 1.00           |
| Absent                     | 138                                 | 95.8%                                | 59                                     | 96.7%                                |                |
| Procedure carried out:     |                                     |                                      |  |                                      |                |
| Right hemicolectomy        | 72                                  | 49.7%                                | 32                                     | 52.5%                                | 0.45           |
| Transverse colectomy       | 3                                   | 2.1%                                 | 2                                      | 3.3%                                 |                |
| Left hemicolectomy         | 40                                  | 27.6%                                | 14                                     | 22.9%                                |                |
| Sigmoidectomy              | 27                                  | 18.6%                                | 9                                      | 14.7%                                |                |
| LAR                        | 3                                   | 2.1%                                 | 3                                      | 4.9%                                 |                |
| Hartmann's procedure       | 0                                   | 0%                                   | 1                                      | 1.6%                                 |                |
| Postoperative chemotherapy |                                     |                                      |  |                                      |                |
| Present                    | 66                                  | 45.8%                                | 28                                     | 47.5%                                | 0.88           |
| Absent                     | 78                                  | 54.2%                                | 31                                     | 52.5%                                |                |
| Anticoagulant              |                                     |                                      |  |                                      |                |
| Present                    | 12                                  | 8.3%                                 | 7                                      | 11.5%                                | 0.44           |
| Absent                     | 133                                 | 91.7%                                | 54                                     | 88.5%                                |                |
| Length of hospital stay    | 14.4                                | 9                                    | 15.7                                   | 14.1                                 | 0.43           |

*BMI* body mass index ( $\text{kg}/\text{m}^2$ ), *ASA* American Society of Anesthesiologists score, *HTN* arterial hypertension, *COPD* chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, *LAR* lower anterior resection

### Survival in the 3 years after surgery

After 3 years, 145 patients were still alive (70.4%) and 122 patients had not had a relapse (59.2%). Table 6 records the survival data according to the subgroups of the sample group. Thus,  $\geq 70\%$  adherence to an ER program did not significantly

improve the chances of surviving 3 years after surgery, either for the whole sample group ( $p = 0.63$ ) (Fig. 2a), for patients with metastatic cancer ( $p = 0.67$ ) (Fig. 2b), or for the patients with surgical complications ( $p = 0.61$ ) (Fig. 2c).

There was also no change to the chances of survival without relapse in 3 years for the group that adhered fully to the

**Table 3** Surviving 3 years after surgery according to the effects of surgery and anatomic pathology information

|                       | Surviving 3 years |       | Not surviving 3 years |       | <i>p</i> value       |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|----------------------|
| Complications         | 62                | 42.8% | 42                    | 68.8% | <i>0.001</i>         |
| No complications      | 83                | 57.2% | 19                    | 31.1% |                      |
| Anastomotic fistula   | 13                | 9%    | 5                     | 8.2%  | 1                    |
| No fistula            | 132               | 91%   | 56                    | 91.8% |                      |
| Resection margin      |                   |       |                       |       |                      |
| R0                    | 145               | 10%   | 58                    | 98.3% | 0.289                |
| R1                    | 0                 | 0%    | 1                     | 1.7%  |                      |
| Stage                 |                   |       |                       |       |                      |
| 0                     | 2                 | 1.4%  | 0                     | 0%    | <i>p &lt; 0.0001</i> |
| 1                     | 18                | 12.8% | 6                     | 10%   |                      |
| 2                     | 47                | 33.3% | 9                     | 15%   |                      |
| 3                     | 56                | 39.7% | 16                    | 26.7% |                      |
| 4                     | 18                | 12.8% | 29                    | 48.3% |                      |
| Stage M               |                   |       |                       |       |                      |
| M0                    | 127               | 87.6% | 31                    | 50.8% | <i>p &lt; 0.0001</i> |
| M1                    | 18                | 12.4% | 30                    | 49.2% |                      |
| MSI                   |                   |       |                       |       |                      |
| No loss of expression | 29                | 85.3% | 6                     | 66.7% | 0.332                |
| Loss of expression    | 5                 | 14.7% | 3                     | 33.3% |                      |
| Perineural invasions  | 24                | 26.1% | 14                    | 43.7% | 0.076                |
| Peritumoral emboli    | 42                | 34.4% | 29                    | 58%   | <i>0.006</i>         |
| Relapse 1 year        | 11                | 7.6%  | 19                    | 47.5% | <i>p &lt; 0.0001</i> |
| Relapse 2 years       | 23                | 15.9% | 22                    | 71%   | <i>p &lt; 0.0001</i> |
| Relapse 3 years       | 23                | 15.9% | 25                    | 100%  | <i>p &lt; 0.0001</i> |

Italic emphasis is for significant results

recovery program, whether in the overall sample group ( $p = 0.93$ ), the patients with metastatic cancer ( $p = 0.79$ ), or the patients with surgical complications ( $p = 0.86$ ).

## Discussion

This monocentric, retrospective study included 206 patients who underwent a colectomy as a result of cancer. Out of the study's overall sample group, 145 patients (70.4%) were still alive after 3 years and 122 had not had a relapse after 3 years (59.2%). Risk factors affecting chances of survival 3 years after surgery include advanced-stage tumors ( $p < 0.0001$ ), synchronous metastases ( $p < 0.0001$ ), peritumoral emboli ( $p = 0.006$ ), and surgical complications ( $p < 0.001$ ). The length of hospitalization was significantly longer in the group ER < 70% than in the group ER  $\geq$  70% ( $p = 0.047$ ). In conclusion, whether for the overall sample group or the groups separated according to the initial status of metastatic cancer or the development of a postoperative complication, a 70% threshold of adherence to the ER program did not influence the chances of surviving the 3 years after surgery.

Firstly, our study records an overall survival rate of 70% and a survival rate without relapses of 59.2% 3 years after surgery. This is similar to the literature, which records an

overall survival rate of 60% and a survival rate without relapses of 30 to 55% in the 5 years after surgery, depending on the stage of the tumor [17, 18]. In our study, the main risk factors contributing to relapses reported in the literature, such as the stage of the tumor, peritumoral emboli, synchronous metastases, or surgical complications, were closely associated with survival in our study [19]. However, the presence of perineural invasions did not significantly increase the risk of relapse in our study ( $p = 0.08$ ) despite the fact that this was reported as a risk factor in the literature [20]. This disparity with the literature is most likely explained by the volume of missing data due to the fact that these have only recently been included as a factor in anatomic pathologists' reports.

Secondly, we have assessed the impact that long-term adherence to the program has on survival. In our overall sample group, total survival, or survival without relapse, was not influenced by following the ER program ( $p = 0.63$  and  $p = 0.93$ , respectively). These findings conflict with the literature. In fact, Gustafsson et al. [12] note a reduced risk of death 5 years after surgery with a HR of 0.58 (95% CI = 0.39–0.88) associated with adherence of  $\geq$  70%. Furthermore, Curtis et al. [13] note that a combined approach of a laparoscopy and an ER program would increase the chances of survival after 5 years with an HR of 1.55 (95% CI = 0.16–2.06). This disparity may be explained by the fact these two studies include follow-ups

**Table 4** Adherence to recommendations of enhanced recovery according to demographic information, medical history, and treatments

| Adherence to the recommendations | Ratio $\geq 70\%$ |                               | Ratio $< 70\%$ |                               | <i>p</i> value |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
|                                  | Mean/actual       | Standard deviation/percentage | Mean/actual    | Standard deviation/percentage |                |
| Age                              | 68.2              | 12.6                          | 71.8           | 11.8                          | 0.06           |
| BMI                              | 27.6              | 6.5                           | 26.1           | 4.8                           | 0.13           |
| Sex                              |                   |                               |                |                               |                |
| Female                           | 19                | 36.5%                         | 68             | 44.2%                         | 0.42           |
| Male                             | 33                | 63.5%                         | 86             | 55.8%                         |                |
| Diabetes                         |                   |                               |                |                               |                |
| Present                          | 10                | 19.2%                         | 25             | 16.3%                         | 0.67           |
| Absent                           | 42                | 80.8%                         | 128            | 83.7%                         |                |
| Dyslipidemia                     |                   |                               |                |                               |                |
| Present                          | 16                | 30.8%                         | 33             | 21.6%                         | 0.19           |
| Absent                           | 36                | 69.2%                         | 120            | 78.4%                         |                |
| ASA score                        |                   |                               |                |                               |                |
| 1                                | 4                 | 7.7%                          | 21             | 13.7%                         | 0.10           |
| 2                                | 23                | 44.2%                         | 72             | 47.1%                         |                |
| 3                                | 23                | 44.2%                         | 60             | 39.2%                         |                |
| 4                                | 2                 | 3.9%                          | 0              | 0%                            |                |
| Hypertension (HTN)               |                   |                               |                |                               |                |
| Present                          | 25                | 48.1%                         | 67             | 43.5%                         | 0.63           |
| Absent                           | 27                | 51.9%                         | 87             | 56.5%                         |                |
| COPD                             |                   |                               |                |                               |                |
| Present                          | 4                 | 7.8%                          | 4              | 2.6%                          | 0.11           |
| Absent                           | 47                | 92.2%                         | 150            | 97.4%                         |                |
| Procedure carried out:           |                   |                               |                |                               |                |
| Right hemicolectomy              | 27                | 51.9%                         | 77             | 50%                           | 0.61           |
| Transverse colectomy             | 0                 | 0%                            | 5              | 3.2%                          |                |
| Left hemicolectomy               | 13                | 25%                           | 41             | 26.6%                         |                |
| Sigmoidectomy                    | 9                 | 17.3%                         | 27             | 17.5%                         |                |
| LAR                              | 3                 | 5.8%                          | 3              | 1.9%                          |                |
| Hartmann's procedure             | 0                 | 0%                            | 1              | 0.6%                          |                |
| Postoperative chemotherapy       |                   |                               |                |                               |                |
| Present                          | 24                | 47.1%                         | 70             | 46.1%                         | 1              |
| Absent                           | 27                | 52.9%                         | 82             | 53.9%                         |                |
| Anticoagulant                    |                   |                               |                |                               |                |
| Present                          | 9                 | 17.3%                         | 10             | 6.5%                          | 0.27           |
| Absent                           | 43                | 82.7%                         | 144            | 93.5%                         |                |
| Length of hospital stay          | 12.2              | 12                            | 15.7           | 10.2                          | 0.047          |

*BMI* body mass index ( $\text{kg}/\text{m}^2$ ), *ASA* American Society of Anesthesiologists score, *HTN* arterial hypertension, *COPD* chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, *LAR* lower anterior resection

for 5 years instead of 3 years. However, since our study reveals no signs of improved survival rates for the 3 years after surgery, it is therefore unlikely that an improvement would be noted after 5 years. The differences between the ER programs analyzed in these reports may also explain this disparity. In fact, Gustafsson et al. [13] analyze a program that mainly comprises of epidural analgesia and controlling the replenishment of preoperative intravenous fluid. The preoperative intravenous fluid could in fact serve as an individual predictive

factor for surviving 5 years after surgery [21], but we were unable to use this due to a considerable lack of data as a result of the retrospective nature of this study.

As the ER program did not have an impact on the survival of our overall sample group, we assessed its effect on subgroups of the sample population that were more at risk of relapse, as defined in our findings. Thus, overall survival and survival without relapse in patients with metastatic cancer and in patients with postoperative complications were

**Table 5** Adherence to recommendations of enhanced recovery by  $\geq$  or  $<$  70%, according to operative morbidity and anatomic pathology data

|                               | Ratio $\geq$ 70% |        | Ratio $<$ 70% |       | <i>p</i> value |
|-------------------------------|------------------|--------|---------------|-------|----------------|
| Overall morbidity             | 23               | 4.4%   | 81            | 5.2%  | 0.337          |
| Anastomotic fistula           | 8                | 15.4%  | 10            | 6.5%  | 0.83           |
| Intraperitoneal accumulation  | 4                | 7.7%   | 20            | 13%   | 0.30           |
| Internal abscess              | 1                | 1.9%   | 3             | 1.9%  | 1              |
| Medical complication          | 5                | 9.6%   | 32            | 20.8% | 0.07           |
| Postoperative ileus           | 7                | 13.5%  | 12            | 7.8%  | 0.27           |
| Infection/bladder obstruction | 2                | 3.8%   | 14            | 9.1%  | 0.37           |
| Pulmonary infection           | 1                | 1.9%   | 9             | 5.8%  | 0.25           |
| Death                         | 1                | 1.9%   | 5             | 3.2%  | 1              |
| Resection margin              |                  |        |               |       |                |
| R0                            | 51               | 100%   | 153           | 99.4% | 1              |
| R1                            | 0                | 0%     | 1             | 0.6%  |                |
| Stage                         |                  |        |               |       |                |
| 0                             | 3                | 5.8%   | 3             | 1.9%  | 0.34           |
| 1                             | 9                | 17.3%  | 15            | 9.7%  |                |
| 2                             | 12               | 23.1%  | 44            | 28.6% |                |
| 3                             | 17               | 32.7%  | 55            | 35.7% |                |
| 4                             | 11               | 21.2%  | 37            | 24%   |                |
| Stage M                       |                  |        |               |       |                |
| M0                            | 42               | 80.8%  | 116           | 75.3% | 0.46           |
| M1                            | 10               | 19.2%  | 38            | 24.7% |                |
| MSI                           |                  |        |               |       |                |
| No loss of expression         | 13               | 86.7%  | 22            | 78.6% | 0.69           |
| Loss of expression            | 2                | 13.33% | 6             | 21.4% |                |
| Perineural invasions          | 7                | 21%    | 31            | 34.4% | 0.19           |
| Peritumoral emboli            | 16               | 34%    | 55            | 44%   | 0.30           |
| Relapse 1 year                | 7                | 15.2%  | 23            | 16.5% | 1              |
| Relapse 2 years               | 12               | 26.7%  | 33            | 25.2% | 0.84           |
| Relapse 3 years               | 13               | 30.2%  | 35            | 28%   | 0.84           |

MSI microsatellite instability

compared according to the extent to which they adhered to the ER program. As the ER program reduced postoperative immunodepression, inflammation, and surgical stress, it was anticipated that the latter two sample groups would benefit from the advantages of ER programs. Surprisingly, there was no evidence that following this recovery program resulted in different survival rates in the two subgroups 3 years after surgery.

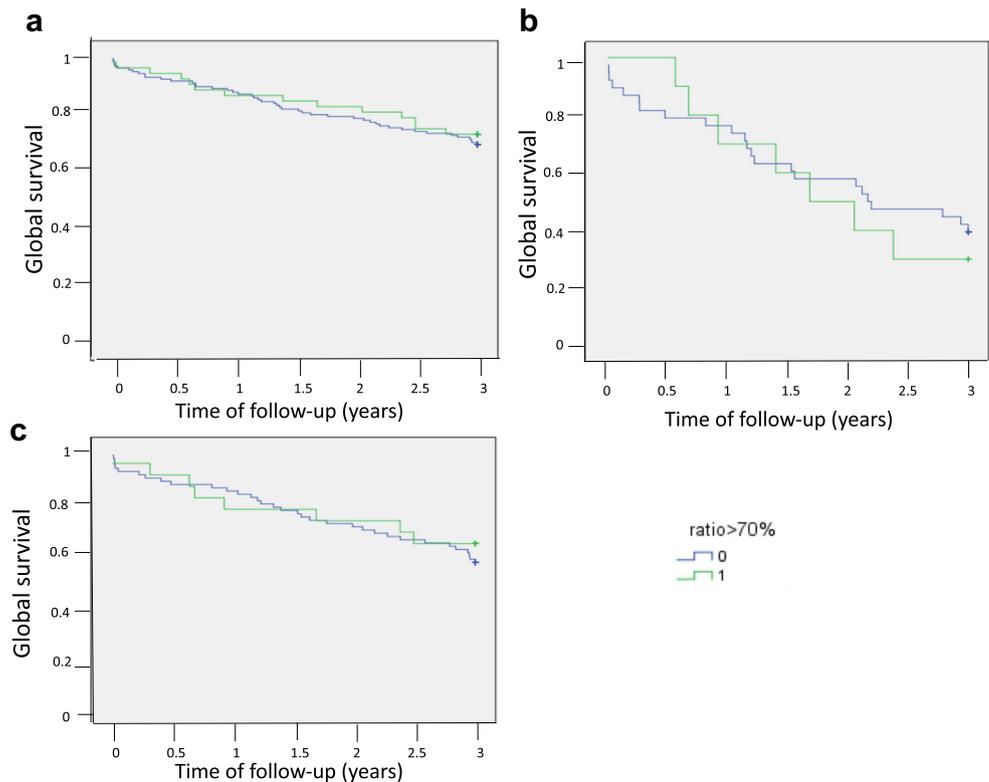
Although our study does not agree with the literature regarding the long-term benefits of ER programs, our findings are unlikely to have been influenced by a selection bias since the differences between the groups  $<$  and  $\geq$  70% following the recovery program in the short-term were comparable to those in the literature.

In fact, the group of patients following the ER program  $\geq$  70% did not differ greatly from the group of patients who followed it  $<$  70% with regard to demographic characteristics or the cancer treatment and its characteristics. This made the two groups comparable. It is interesting to note that the short-term benefits of ER programs reported in the literature were confirmed in our study. Hence, a reduction in the average hospitalization period was observed ( $p = 0.047$ ). The literature notes a reduction in the hospitalization period by 2 days as a result of ER programs [22]. Similarly, we noted a reduction in

**Table 6** Estimated overall survival rate and without relapse in the general sample group and in patients with metastatic cancer or postoperative complications

| General sample group                  |                          |                           |  |  |                |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--|--|----------------|
| Overall survival                      | $>$ 70% ( <i>N</i> = 52) | $<$ 70% ( <i>N</i> = 154) |  |  | <i>p</i> value |
| Surviving 3 years                     | 38 (73.1%)               | 107 69.5%                 |  |  | 0.632          |
| Not surviving 3 years                 | 14 (26.9%)               | 47 30.5%                  |  |  |                |
| Surviving without relapse for 3 years |                          |                           |  |  |                |
| Present                               | 30 (57.7%)               | 92 59.7%                  |  |  | 0.931          |
| Absent                                | 22 (42.3%)               | 62 40.3%                  |  |  |                |
| Patients with metastatic cancer       |                          |                           |  |  |                |
| Overall survival                      | $>$ 70% ( <i>N</i> = 10) | $<$ 70% ( <i>N</i> = 38)  |  |  | <i>p</i> value |
| Surviving 3 years                     | 3 30.00%                 | 15 39.47%                 |  |  | 0.668          |
| Not surviving 3 years                 | 7 70.00%                 | 23 60.53%                 |  |  |                |
| Surviving without relapse for 3 years |                          |                           |  |  |                |
| Present                               | 2 20.00%                 | 8 21.05%                  |  |  | 0.795          |
| Absent                                | 8 80.00%                 | 30 78.95%                 |  |  |                |
| Complications                         |                          |                           |  |  |                |
| Overall survival                      | $>$ 70% ( <i>N</i> = 23) | $<$ 70% ( <i>N</i> = 81)  |  |  | <i>p</i> value |
| Surviving 3 years                     | 15 65.22%                | 47 58.03%                 |  |  | 0.615          |
| Not surviving 3 years                 | 8 34.78%                 | 34 41.97%                 |  |  |                |
| Surviving without relapse for 3 years |                          |                           |  |  |                |
| Present                               | 12 52.17%                | 41 50.62%                 |  |  | 0.856          |
| Absent                                | 11 47.83%                | 40 49.38%                 |  |  |                |

**Fig. 2** Estimation of 3-year global survival according to the compliance with the enhanced recovery program (< or  $\geq 70\%$ ) **a** in overall population, **b** in the population of patients with metastasis, **c** in the population of patients experiencing postoperative morbidity



the instances of non-surgical morbidities ( $p = 0.07$ ). The fact that the difference was not significant is most likely linked to a collection bias as the data was collected from reports on file. Surgical morbidity, which is generally not as serious, may be underestimated as it is probably not reported as extensively in discharge reports. However, despite this collection bias, our findings are in line with the literature as a recent meta-analysis also recorded a reduction in the instances of non-surgical morbidities [RR = 0.71; CI 95% 0.60–0.86], without an improvement to mortality or surgical morbidity [23].

Nonetheless, this study is limited due to its retrospective nature. In fact, some of the data on surgical morbidity may have been underestimated in the sample group before 2012 as it was recorded on paper, making it more difficult to compile than after 2012, when it began to become available electronically.

However, the primary and secondary evaluation criteria were compiled prospectively, therefore limiting this bias.

Similarly, it was not possible to collect some significant information on enhanced recovery, such as information on fluid replacement techniques adapted according to the case. This could reduce the impact of our recovery program on surviving 3 years after surgery. Finally, since an insufficient number of the ER group returned for follow-ups, we were only able to assess survival to 3 years. However, evidently this only presents a minor bias since the survival curves do not tend to diverge after 3 years.

## Conclusion

The introduction of an enhanced recovery program with a compliance rate of  $\geq 70\%$  brings short-term benefits, such as a reduction in hospitalization periods and non-surgical morbidity. In contrast, in our study,  $\geq 70\%$  adherence did not result in improving overall survival rates, or in reducing relapses in the overall sample group or in the at-risk patients who underwent surgery for bowel cancer. Although these findings still need to be confirmed in other sample groups, this should not impede the implementation of ER programs as their short-term, postoperative benefits, on healthcare spending, for example, are huge and have been widely documented.

**Author's contribution** A Venara and P Viannay made substantial contributions to the conception and design of this work, acquisition and interpretation of data and drafted the manuscript. They gave their final approval of the version to be published and their agreement to be held accountable for all aspects of the work.

A Hamy, R Jaouen, C Luel, FX Caroli-Bosc, and S Vasseur made substantial contributions to the acquisition and interpretation of data and critically revised the manuscript, as well as giving their final approval of the version to be published and their agreement to be held accountable for all aspects of the work.

M Levailant and JF Hamel made substantial contributions to the interpretation and analysis of data and drafted the manuscript, as well as giving his final approval of the version to be published and his agreement to be held accountable for all aspects of the work.

## Compliance with ethical standards

**Conflict of interest** P Viannay, A Hamy, R Jaouen, FX Caroli-Bosc, C Luel, S Vasseur, M Levaillant, JF Hamel, and A Venara have no conflicts of interest or financial ties related to this work to disclose.

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