

PARISH NURSE'S NOTES - NOVEMBER 2023

NOVEMBER IS PROSTATE CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

EARLY DETECTION IS KEY.

The difference between early detection and late detection can be life and death.

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO DO, AND WHEN.

When you're

50.

You need to have a conversation with your doctor about PSA testing.

If you're African American, do it at

45.

If you have a family history, do it at

45.

WHO'S AT RISK?

Your risk of developing prostate cancer increases with age, but that doesn't mean it's a disease that only affects old men. Prostate cancer is the second most common cancer in men worldwide. Men who are African American, and men who have a family history (a brother or father with prostate cancer), are 2.5x more likely to get prostate cancer.

If you're **50**, you should be talking to your doctor about PSA testing. If you're African American, you need to start that conversation at **45**. And if you have a brother or father with prostate cancer in their history, do it at **45**.

WHAT'S A PSA TEST?

It's a simple routine blood test.

It's used to determine the measurement of Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) concentration in the blood, it is the primary method of testing for prostate cancer. You should be talking to your doctor about whether testing is right for you.

SO WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

Go to the doctor.

Ask about PSA testing.

Catch prostate cancer early.

THE FACTS ABOUT PROSTATE CANCER

Only men have a prostate gland

. The prostate gland is usually the size and shape of a walnut and grows bigger as you get older. It sits underneath the bladder and surrounds the urethra, which is the tube men urinate and ejaculate through. Its main job is to help make semen – the fluid that carries sperm.

Prostate cancer occurs when some of the cells in the prostate reproduce far more rapidly than normal, resulting in a tumor. Prostate cancer often grows slowly to start with and may never cause any problems. But some men have prostate cancer that is more likely to spread. These prostate cancer cells, if left untreated, may spread from the prostate and invade distant parts of the body, particularly the lymph nodes and bones, producing secondary tumors in a process known as metastasis.

Detecting prostate cancer

Not everyone experiences symptoms of prostate cancer. Many times, signs of prostate cancer are first detected by a doctor during a routine check-up.

Some men, however, will experience changes in urinary or sexual function that might indicate the presence of prostate cancer.

If you (or your partner) are looking to take charge of your sex life and sexual recovery after prostate cancer, visit [**True North**](#) for more guidance.

Signs and symptoms

- A need to urinate frequently, especially at night
- Difficulty starting urination or holding back urine
- Weak or interrupted flow of urine
- Painful or burning urination
- Difficulty in having an erection
- Painful ejaculation
- Blood in urine or semen
- Frequent pain or stiffness in the lower back, hips, or upper thighs

Treating prostate cancer

Treatment options are many and varied. Testing still can't answer lots of key questions about disease aggression, prognosis and progression.

If you have been diagnosed with prostate cancer, it's important to keep in mind that many prostate cancers are slow growing and may not need surgery or other radical treatment.

Treatment options include:

- Active Surveillance
- Prostatectomy
- Radiotherapy
- Hormone Therapy
- Chemotherapy

Choosing a treatment for prostate cancer

Aim to be ok with the treatment decision you make, take risks and benefits into consideration.

Learn what you can, make use of the quality services and resources available. When making treatment decisions the following is recommended:

- Make a decision after a treatment recommendation from a multi-disciplinary meeting (where available). This meeting would ideally consist of input from the following specialists: urologists, radiation oncologists, medical oncologists, radiologist, nursing and allied health.
- Seek a second opinion for a recommended treatment option that is right for you, from both a urologist as well as a radiation oncologist.
- Enquire as to whether a specialist is part of a quality improvement audit, such as a registry.
- Utilize the cancer support services available in your country to increase your levels of information and understanding around treatment options, and potential side effects. Phone Prostate Cancer Foundation on 1 800 757 2873 or **visit their website**.
- Approach your GP if you have concerns or want a second opinion.

Ongoing side effects of prostate cancer treatment

Depending on the treatment you undergo, you may experience some of the following:

- Incontinence (involuntary leakage of urine)
- Erectile dysfunction (difficulty achieving or maintaining an erection)
- Weight gain due to hormone therapy
- Depression

These side effects have different durations for different people.

Because a side effect of treatment may include erectile dysfunction, prostate cancer can have a serious impact on intimate relationships. As many people who have been through the journey will tell you, prostate cancer isn't just a man's disease, it's a couple's disease. Make sure you involve your partner as you think through the various treatment options.