



UROLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

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Early Prostate Cancer Testing Saves Lives

The level of risk a man faces of dying from prostate cancer can be predicted from a single prostate specific antigen (PSA) test taken before 50 years of age according to a study recently presented at the American Urological Association (AUA) Annual Meeting in Washington.

The study, conducted on a large population of Swedish men, shows that the initial PSA levels of men aged 44 to 50 years of age can predict the risk of a death from prostate cancer up to 30 years in advance.

The research, which analysed blood samples donated between 1974 and 1986 by 12,090 men, showed that 44 per cent of eventual prostate cancer deaths occurred in the 10 per cent of those men with the highest levels of the protein PSA.

“This study appears to tell us two important things. First, it confirms the life-saving benefits of men speaking with their GP and undergoing a PSA and DRE test in their 40’s and, secondly; a one-off test taken much earlier may help to reduce the need for more frequent tests later,” said the President of the Urological Society of Australia and New Zealand, Dr Stephen Ruthven. Dr Ruthven has just returned from the Inaugural International Prostate Cancer Symposium in New York, and the AUA Meeting in Washington.

The study, led by the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre in New York, suggests that men who test for high levels of PSA (more than 1.6ng/mL) in their 40’s would be well advised to be monitored closely as they age – whilst the rest might only need to be tested 3 times from the ages of 44 to 60.

“A two-tiered prostate cancer surveillance system that concentrates the biggest testing effort on the minority of men at greatest risk could result in a significant reduction in the number of deaths from prostate cancer in Australia and New Zealand,” Dr Ruthven said.

At present approximately 3,000 men in Australia and New Zealand die of prostate cancer each year – a mortality rate comparable to the number of women who die from breast cancer.

“The evidence now appears overwhelming that men in their 40’s need to speak with their GPs about the merits of undertaking an early PSA test rather than waiting. For most this simple blood test and examination will provide peace of mind. For others it will result in closer surveillance and much greater opportunity for early detection and successful treatment.

“In the fight against any form of cancer early detection and treatment often means the difference between life and death,” Dr Ruthven said.

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