

Care is needed in cancer debate

Prostate cancer is deadly for men and prevention is still better than the cure, writes Tory Shepherd.

DEBATE over prostate cancer screening has been raging in recent months and is set to continue for the foreseeable future.

The test measures levels of the prostate specific antigen (PSA). Increased levels can indicate cancer.

But the test has come under fire because it is not as reliable as many other tests and experts are concerned it leads to unnecessary interventions.

Prostate cancer is one of the most common and the most deadly cancers in men.

It can be cured through surgery or radiotherapy if it is discovered in time. But because it usually occurs in older men - those over 50 - and is slow-growing, it may never actually cause a threat to life. There are good reasons to avoid the treatment for cancer if possible. It can cause impotence, incontinence, and other problems. Prostate Cancer Foun-

dation of Australia chief executive officer Andrew Giles says it is possible up to 30 per cent of men are treated for prostate cancers that would not have killed them.

"False positives lead to men being treated for cancers they don't need to be treated for," he says. "If you're going to treat it you're going to have flow-on effects in terms of incontinence and impotency and so on. They're big issues, and you don't want men to have those issues if the cancer wasn't going to kill them."

There were big hopes that two recent studies would clear up the confusion, but Mr Giles says the jury is still out.

Preliminary results from a U.S. study of 76,000 men did not find a benefit from testing, while a European study published at the same time and looking at 162,000 men found it could cut death rates from prostate cancer by 20 per cent.

"They're a positive step, but inconclusive," Mr Giles says. "We're suggesting people should wait until the full data comes out."

The nation's peak body for urological surgeons said the studies were flawed.

Urological Society of Australia and New Zealand president Dr David Malouf said patients should have access to PSA-based testing if they wished.

"We are concerned that Australian men may be persuaded against having a potentially life-saving PSA test following media reports of this study," he said.

The PCFA agrees men need to arm themselves with all the information available and discuss their options with their doctor.

"It's pretty hard to tell guys, look, you've got cancer but our advice is not to have it treated. Guys just want to get in there and have it cut out," Mr Giles says. "Be a man, and talk to your doctor about it." »



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Todd Barry and Simon Buckley on their bikes in Adelaide.

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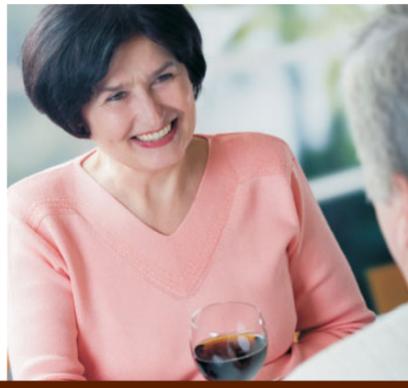
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