

By Briefs

■ Prostate cancer

If you are a male over 50 years of age, you may be at risk for prostate cancer. Men who have a relative with the disease, are African-American, or who eat a lot of animal fat are at an even greater risk. The Kidney & Urology Foundation of America urges men who suspect they may be at risk for prostate cancer to talk to their doctors about getting screened for the deadly disease.

Watch for the following symptoms:

- A need to urinate more often, especially at night
- Trouble starting urination
- Difficulty holding urine back
- An inability to urinate at times
- Weak or interrupted flow of urine
- Painful urination or a burning sensation when urinating
- Difficulty in experiencing an erection
- Painful ejaculation
- Blood in urine or semen
- Pain and/or stiffness in the lower back, hips, or upper thighs

To learn more about prostate cancer or to find a urologist near you, contact the Kidney & Urology Foundation by visiting www.kidneyurology.org or calling (800) 633-6628.

■ Virtual technique

Troy Internal Medicine, P.C. now offers virtual colonoscopy, an alternative to traditional colonoscopy for senior citizens with certain health conditions.

Virtual colonoscopy is a newer, minimally invasive technique for detecting polyps and cancer in the colon using a CT scan and specialized software. As with a traditional colonoscopy, virtual colonoscopy requires a one-day preparation. However, unlike traditional colonoscopy, patients having virtual colonoscopy do not need to discontinue aspirin, non-steroid anti-inflammatory medications or the blood thinner Coumadin prior to the test.

Also important to note and other patients is that virtual colonoscopy does not risk perforation of the colon wall. Because the colon is examined using a CT scan and virtual reality computer software, there is no need to insert the traditional colonoscope, a long tube, into the rectum and colon.

Additionally, patients may not need a driver because there is no sedation and they are fully functional after the exam. CO₂ (carbon dioxide), which is used to inflate the colon for virtual colonoscopy, is rapidly absorbed, so the discomfort level is minimal to non-existent. Further, the test takes only three minutes to perform.

"Many seniors find it hard to tolerate long periods of discomfort during medical tests, especially if they are frail," said Dr. James Henderson, medical director. "Virtual colonoscopy really eliminates the majority of perceived negatives associated with a colonoscopy."

Troy Internal Medicine is located at 4600 Inverness Drive, Suite 300, Troy for more information visit www.troyinternalmedicine.com or call (248) 267-5000 and press 8.

HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY

HRT has benefits, say doctors, but there are alternatives

BY HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

As part of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, local health care providers are encouraging women to do two things — make sure to get mammograms if they're 40 and older, and explore their hormone replacement therapy options if they are approaching or experiencing menopause.

A recent Women's Health Initiative study showed a possible link between breast cancer and hormone replacement therapy (HRT). The study, however, has been criticized by local physicians who maintain that the hormone therapy is still a good way to prevent osteoporosis and maintain quality of life.

The five-year study involved 16,000 women using estrogen and progestin combination HRT. The therapy has been widely used as a way to prevent coronary heart disease in post-menopausal women. The study was to have ended in 2005 but was stopped at the end of May because of the risk for invasive breast cancer, as well as cardiac events and strokes.

The findings reported a 26 percent increase in invasive breast cancer over the placebo group (38 vs. 30 per 10,000 person-years), but the absolute risk was just eight more incidents of invasive cancer.

The study involved women using Prempro, an oral HRT preparation manufactured by Wyeth Ayer, which combines 0.625 mg. of estrogen extracted from mare's urine and progestin, in the form of 2.5 mg. of medroxyprogesterone acetate.

Some patients are at particular risk from HRT side effects. Women with vaginal bleeding of unknown cause,



Dr. Kavita Rao, of Oakwood Complementary and Alternative Medicine Center, talks with a patient about natural alternatives to hormone replacement therapy.

chronic disease of the liver, a family history of breast or uterine cancer or blood clots in the veins, legs, or lungs risk negative HRT side effects, according to the Web site, hormone-replacement-therapy-side-effects.com.

As for the recent study, Bingham Farms-based Dr. Jerry Nosanchuk said that women have been unduly scared away from using HRT. He has considered himself a "menopausalist" since 1984 and is a founding member of the North American Menopause Society.

GETTING UNDER THE SKIN

Nosanchuk endorses a transdermal, rather than oral, approach to HRT. Transdermal HRT is administered through a skin patch similar to a nicotine patch, and is considered superior to ingesting pills, though the pills are more popular, Nosanchuk said.

The most optimal hormone replacement therapy is never oral estrogen," he



FACTS ABOUT BREAST CANCER

■ One in eight women will develop breast cancer during her lifetime.

■ Mammograms can detect cancer up to two years before a lump can be felt.

■ If all women 50 and over had mammograms at the recommended intervals, the mortality rate would be reduced by 30 percent — 13,000 American lives would be saved per year.

■ Eighty percent of women who develop breast cancer have no family history of the disease.

■ An estimated 185,700 new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed in the United States during 1996, making it the most frequently diagnosed cancer among women.

■ Breast cancer is currently the second leading cause of cancer death in women, with an estimated 44,560 women losing their lives to this disease during 1995 — one woman every 12 minutes.

■ More than 90 percent of women whose breast cancer is found and treated early with no spreading beyond the breast, will survive.

said. "It doesn't mean oral estrogen is terrible — it's just not optimal."

"Bioidentical" alternatives, such as soy-derived HRT, are superior to the oral HRT products, including Prempro, which use female horse excretions, Nosanchuk said.

Oral HRT, but not transdermal HRT, raises the level of C-Reactive Protein, which is closely related to cardiac events. Other negative effects of oral HRT are increased insulin resistance and raised levels of sex hormone-binding globulin, which binds to a woman's natural levels of testosterone.

This hormonal condition generates the most complaints among his patients, a majority of whom started on oral HRT then switched to transdermal HRT. That is because the symptoms are decreased sex drive, decreased energy, reduced muscle mass, weight gain and a "pot belly."

PLEASE SEE HRT, C7

Cryosurgery: a new weapon against breast cancer

Women may soon have a new weapon to use in the fight against breast cancer. It's minimally invasive and does not cause permanent disfigurement as with other procedures like a mastectomy, where the breast is entirely removed, or a lumpectomy, in which the cancer is removed from the breast and radiation therapy is often needed.

This potentially new treatment, called cryosurgery, is currently being studied by the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center. Researchers are investigating the possibility that in addition to destroying the tumor, cryosurgery may stimulate the immune system to attack any remaining cancer cells, providing a better chance for survival for the approximately 200,000 women diagnosed with breast cancer this year alone.

Cryosurgery involves making a very small incision in the skin. Using an ultrasound, a probe is placed in the center of the tumor to freeze and kill the cancer cells, says Dr. Michael Sabel, a surgical oncologist at the U-M Comprehensive

Cancer Center.

"The tip of the probe gets extremely cold and essentially forms an iceball around the tumor," he explains. "That, in effect, kills all of the cancer cells, which allows the body to reabsorb the tissue so there's not a large defect in the breast."

USES IMMUNE SYSTEM

In contrast to other techniques used to treat breast cancer, cryosurgery leaves the shell of the cancer cells intact. This allows the immune system to clean up the area, exposing the tumor proteins to the white blood cells.

And by exposing the immune system to the tumor, it may help prevent cancer from returning or spreading to other parts of the body — a common occurrence in breast cancer patients who are diagnosed after the cancer has already spread to the lymph nodes or beyond.

"I'm hoping that by freezing the tumor, the immune system will learn to recognize cancer and go out and destroy cancer in

other parts of the body, the same way it looks for bacteria or viruses with certain proteins," says Sabel.

Cryosurgery is also used to destroy abnormal cervical cells and correct problems with inflammation or chronic discharge. In addition, cryosurgery has been used to treat tumors in the liver and benign lesions in the breast.

TRIAL UNDER WAY

However, the effectiveness of cryosurgery as a treatment for breast cancer is still being investigated by the U-M Comprehensive Cancer Center. Currently, a trial is under way at the Center with women who are in the early stages of breast cancer.

In the trial, participants undergo cryosurgery followed by the procedure they would have otherwise had — either a lumpectomy or mastectomy — three weeks later. Using this process, researchers are able to find out if the cancer has been destroyed and if the immune system has

been stimulated.

"I believe cryosurgery will be very useful in the future for treatment in the early stages of breast cancer," Sabel says.

To learn more about cancer and about research studies conducted at the U-M Health System, contact the U-M Comprehensive Cancer Center's Cancer AnswerLine at 1-800-865-1125.

For more information, visit the following Web sites:

- U-M Health Topics A-Z: Breast Cancer
www.med.umich.edu/lib/cancer/breast102.htm
- U-M Health Topic A-Z: Cryotherapy
www.med.umich.edu/lib/tests/testc29.htm
- U-M Health Topic A-Z: Cancer Warning Signs
www.med.umich.edu/lib/cancer/wrks03.htm
- NCI: What You Need To Know About Breast Cancer
www.nci.nih.gov/cancerinfo/syntk/bre