

Not as forgiving

Prostate cancer is one of big 3 diseases

By KURT KUBAN
SPECIAL WRITER

There are situations in life when the old proverb "better late than never" just doesn't fit. Take, for example, the case of men getting checked for prostate cancer.

Of the 185,000 men that were diagnosed with the disease last year in the United States, over 39,000 will die because of it. That's roughly one in five. The reality is that of those 39,000, many, if not most, could have experienced a longer life had they gone to see their doctor sooner.

Let's face it — most men don't like to go to the doctor. Many wait until they feel sick or are prodded by a significant other before dragging themselves into their doctor's office. With some illnesses, this "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" attitude won't have such serious repercussions.

However, prostate cancer is not as forgiving as most diseases. It, along with colon and lung cancer, is considered one of the big three. Together, they account for over half the cancer deaths in males each year, with prostate cancer the second leading killer.

The key to saving a patient with prostate cancer is to have it diagnosed before the cancer spreads beyond the prostate, which is a walnut-sized gland located just below the bladder.

The problem is that there are no noticeable symptoms until it is too late. By the time a man begins to see blood in his urine, or has related back pain, the cancer is in its later stages and has most likely spread beyond the prostate into areas such as the spine and pelvis.



has spread," said Jorge Torriglia, a urologist with Oakwood Hospital in Dearborn who specializes in prostate procedures.

The two groups of men that are at the highest risk of getting prostate cancer because of their genetic makeup are African-Americans and individuals, regardless of ethnic background, who come from families that have a history of prostate cancer.

According to Torriglia, this risk factor should be taken into account when determining at what point in one's life to begin undergoing regular checkups. "The rule is that high-risk patients should be screened beginning at the age of 40. All other men should begin to be checked at age 50," Torriglia said.

The prostate gland's main function is to produce fluid for the semen. Traditionally, males have had prostate exams only occasionally in years past, were reluctant to discuss it with anybody because of the sensitivity of the issue. Plus, reproduction becomes less of an issue as a man ages.

Prostate cancer is one of those diseases that has been around for a long time, but it is just now beginning to be talked about. Nobody would admit to having prostate cancer in the past, partly because of the stigma and doom that went along with cancer, but also because people didn't really understand the prostate gland itself," said Marianne Simacek, director of the Community Outreach program at St. Joseph Hospital in Livonia.

■ Although diet and lifestyle seem to play a role in some cases, prostate cancer has no known causes. All men are susceptible to developing the disease as they get older, though for some, the risk is much greater.

Another deterrent that keeps men from having regular screenings for prostate cancer is the method, known as a rectal examination, that doctors use when inspecting a patient. Most men are aware of the procedure, and many spend a lifetime trying to figure out how to avoid it.

"Men don't like the idea of a rectal exam. The idea that they have to go through that kind of an exam to find out if they have prostate cancer is kind of chilling for them," Simacek said. "But at the same time, the rectal exam and a blood test are the two best tests that can be done to determine whether or not a man has prostate cancer."

In the rectal exam, a doctor uses his finger to feel if there are any abnormalities in size or

shape of the gland, and the blood test is used to determine the level of prostate-specific antigen (PSA), a substance produced only in the prostate, that is in the blood.

When the PSA level is elevated it is indicative of something being wrong with the gland. Still, despite the fears of most men, many doctors believe the rectal exam is the best tell-tale method of determining if a patient has prostate trouble.

"It [rectal exam] is extremely tolerable and simple, and takes less than a minute," said Zvi Levran, a Livonia urologist who says he has performed thousands of the examinations himself. "I can tell you — any man, any age — if you have anything wrong, if it is benign, if it is suspicious or if it is positive."

Gerard Graham, a Livonia resident who learned he had prostate cancer when he was 55, agrees.

"It's not that bad. There is no discomfort and it's over in seconds," said Graham, a semi-retired lawyer who is now 68. "I recommend to all my friends to at least get the PSA test. There is no reason to hide your head in the sand, because that is not going to accomplish anything."

Considering the death toll that prostate cancer has wreaked on those who failed to get screened early enough, that is pretty sound advice.

Remember, prostate cancer kills, so you need to be checked, especially if it runs in your family," Torriglia said. "It is very important. Any male approaching middle-age should start thinking about it. A rectal exam and a blood test can save your life."

Vaccine program

Providence Hospital and Medical Centers is sponsoring an immunization clinic for children from 4-7 p.m. in the Mission Health Medical Center, 37599 Seven Mile Road at Newburgh. The fee is \$5 per child and covers all vaccines (except chickenpox). Don't forget to bring your child's immunization records. For more information call (877) 345-6500.

Hair loss study

Men who are experiencing hair loss are being sought for a research study at Henry Ford Hospital. The study, conducted by the department of Dermatology, is investigating the effectiveness of an approved drug to treat male pattern hair loss. Patients should be 41-60 years old and currently suffering from hair loss. Medication, doctor visits and parking are free. Patients will be compensated for their time. Call (313) 916-8847 or (313) 916-9759.

Macrobiotics

Macro Val of Garden City offers macrobiotic cooking classes. Upcoming series include beginning cooking, picnic foods, summer pasta salads, vitality foods and all naturally sweet desserts. Learn

step-by-step recipes and participate — hands on. For more information and to register for an upcoming class call (734) 281-2856. Dates include Aug. 2, 6-9 p.m.; Aug. 9, 6-9 p.m.; Aug. 16, 6-9 p.m.; Aug. 23, 6-9 p.m. and Aug. 30, 6-9 p.m.

Restless leg

Restless Leg Syndrome, greater southeast Michigan area support group will meet from 1-2:30 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 31 at Henry Ford OptimEyes, 35184 Central City Parkway in Westland. For information call Lillian Eory at (734) 641-1186 or OptimEyes at (734) 427-5200.

40-30-30 support

Dr. Martin Tamler and Sharon Ostalecki will host the first meeting of the 40-30-30 support group in Livonia. Please bring any questions, recipes or ideas that will help others who are on the 40-30-30 nutritional program. The meeting will be held from 7-9 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 24 at the Livonia Civic Center Library (32777 Five Mile between Farmington Road and Hubbard). There is no charge. Call (248) 344-0890 or visit their Web site <http://community.mlive.com/co/40thru30>

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