

PSA testing – prostate cancer screening (by Dr Masharani 1/11/2022)

Prostate cancer becomes more common as you get older. Because men are living longer you hear more and more people who have prostate cancer.

Unfortunately there is no simple test to detect prostate cancer in a reliable sort of way. A single PSA test in a man with NO symptom of prostate enlargement is very poor guide to whether that person has prostate cancer that will cause harm.

Cancer research UK have summarised the issue of screening as follows:

Why don't we have a prostate cancer screening programme?

The UK National Screening Committee doesn't currently recommend screening for prostate cancer because:[1]

- it is unclear how PSA screening impacts prostate cancer outcomes, specifically death due to prostate cancer*
- there are many harms of PSA screening, such as incorrect diagnosis and complications from further testing and treating*
- there is not enough evidence at present to show that there are better tests than PSA*
- there is no single treatment that is definitely better for patients with early-stage prostate cancer*

Click below on the cancer research uk infographic for further information

https://publications.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/publication-files/Infographic_%E2%80%98PSA%20without%20symptoms%E2%80%99%20update_print_A4.pdf

So what should men do?

Patients with prostate enlargement may well have symptoms such as

- passing urine more often during the day or night (nocturia)
- difficulty passing urine – this includes a weaker flow, not emptying your bladder completely and straining when starting to empty your bladder
- urgency to pass urine

Symptomatic prostate disease is very different from routine screening of patients with NO symptoms discussed above

If you have these symptoms you need to book an appointment to assess your symptoms in more detail. This may include having an examination and a PSA test. More often than not, patients will actually have a benign enlargement of the prostate gland (benign prostatic hyperplasia) rather than cancer. See article here:

<https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/prostate-cancer/symptoms>

Family history of prostate cancer is important to mention at a consultation as these cancers do run in the family

Here is an article regarding what you should be talking about during your consultation with the doctor

<https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/prostate-cancer/getting-diagnosed/seeing-your-gp>