

OVER 40? ASK YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT A PSA TEST

PROSTATE CANCER DETECT. PREVENT. CURE.

Funding cut hobbles prostate cancer research

BY TAMMY LABER

Occurrences of prostate cancer among men over 40 are rising at an alarming rate as Canada's population ages and grows. Ironically, federal government funding for a special research initiative created to attack this disease has decreased in recent years, hobbling the efforts of Canada's health sciences community to combat the disease.

One in 7 Canadian males is afflicted with prostate cancer. This year, estimates predict that more than 20,000 Canadians will be diagnosed with this disease and more than 4,000 will die from it.

"This is almost as common as breast cancer," says Dr. Stuart Edmonds, director of the Canadian Prostate Cancer Research Initiative (CPCRI).

CPCRI was launched in 1997 from efforts led by the Canadian Prostate Cancer Network (CPCN) and the Canadian Cancer Society. Among its founding partners was Health Canada, which committed 5 years of annual \$1-million funding for prostate cancer research.

Despite the increasing threat of prostate cancer, Health Canada

ceased its support of CPCRI two years ago and refused further funding, explains CPCN president Bob Shiell.

Mr. Shiell says the research conducted by CPCRI is now dwindling due to flagging federal support. "The CPCRI has been critical to advancing vital areas of research," he says. "Its studies look beyond the molecular effects to determine prostate cancer's root causes and contributing factors including genetic linkages and drivers linked to lifestyle, behavioural and environmental issues and other areas."

Dr. Edmonds says, "We continue to get funding from the Canadian Cancer Society, but two-thirds of our former funding is gone."

A research network that has been encouraging collaboration among prostate cancer researchers across Canada is now threatened, for example.

Dr. Robert Bristow, the radiation oncologist at Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto who established the network, says it enhances the efficiency of research investments and efforts by connecting Canadian researchers who might otherwise work in isolation on similar projects.



PHOTO: SUPPLIED

The CPCN and others concerned about prostate cancer are calling on government for stronger research funding.

"The research network is a way for Canadian researchers to remain internationally competitive and drive our science at a speed that will get us answers faster. With the refusal of the federal government to continue funding, it is one area that will probably suffer," says Dr. Bristow.

Dr. Edmonds says he would like to see more research not only into cures for prostate cancer, but also its prevention and detection.

Among the supplements showing promise to aid prevention, for example, are vitamin E, selenium, lycopene and anti-oxidants, says Dr. Edmonds. "We need to know more about what works."

Early detection is key in prostate cancer. "It's often found using PSA

testing," says Dr. Edmonds who adds, "We need (an even) better biomarker."

While a combination of PSA testing and digital rectal exam provides today's best indicator, a diagnosis of cancer can only be confirmed through a biopsy. Like others, Dr. Edmonds is hopeful that more research would lead to even better tests that could catch and define cancer at an even earlier stage of its growth.

"You want to know - is this an aggressive form of the cancer? How urgent is its treatment? And you want to detect the cancer before it metastasizes," says Dr. Edmonds. "We need the research, to spare men some of the agony of having to consider treatment options." ■

Give and take

Charitable organization relies on donors

BY RANDALL ANTHONY MANG

Every day of the year, 56 Canadian men are diagnosed with prostate cancer and 11 die from this disease. The Canadian Prostate Cancer Network (CPCN), a national association of prostate cancer support groups active in communities across Canada, is doing something about it.

In addition to promoting awareness and early detection of prostate cancer, the CPCN maintains over 125 volunteer-driven groups coast to coast that help men and their families affected by prostate cancer cope.

While the CPCN receives funding and other support through government grants and corporate donations, its needs continue to grow on ever-increasing demand for CPCN services.

"We also work with government, industry and the medical community, from the survivor's perspective, advocating for better treatment modalities and increased funding for research into the disease," says CPCN executive direc-

tor Wally Seeley. "As our mandate and the numbers of Canadians afflicted with prostate cancer continues to expand, so does our need for funding."

Corporate donors continue to respond, often creatively. For example, Nick Price Golf apparel will soon begin donating \$1 to the CPCN from each article of its specially CPCN-tagged clothing sold in Canada.

Proceeds from a concert in Calgary this October by Irish Tenor John McDermott will also benefit the CPCN.

To make ends meet, however, "Public donations are urgently needed," says Mr. Seeley.

The CPCN recently made it easier for individuals to donate by enabling credit card donations online at www.cpcn.org. ■

To donate by mail, or to learn more, contact the CPCN at The Canadian Prostate Cancer Network, P.O. Box 1253, Lakefield, ON, K0L 2H0; or by calling toll free 1-866-810-CPCN (2726) or 1-800-363-0063 (français).