

Prostate cancer: Unmasking the silent threat

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It's Men's Health Month and the Cancer Association of South Africa (Cansa) puts the focus on an inconspicuous yet significant issue that affects a substantial portion of the South African male population. Prostate cancer, a subtle but formidable adversary, has quietly become one of the most common cancers among men in the nation. #ProstateCancer #MensHealth #CANSACares



The prostate is a gland located just below the bladder, the function of which is to provide nutrients to sperm that are part of the semen. Prostate cancer can be elusive, often manifesting without early noticeable signs or symptoms. Later, symptoms can include frequent passing of urine, especially at night; difficulty starting or stopping urination; weak or interrupted urinary stream; painful or burning sensation during urination or ejaculation; blood in urine or semen. Advanced cancer can cause deep pain in the lower back, hips, or upper thighs. This subtlety, and the fact that most prostate cancers are slow-growing underscores the importance of regular screenings.

As with many cancers, age is a significant risk factor for prostate cancer. The risk of developing this cancer escalates with age. Ethnicity is also a key factor, with studies demonstrating a higher susceptibility among men of colour. In addition, a family history of the disease and genetic factors can increase the risk. Lifestyle choices, such as obesity and a sedentary routine, further contribute to the potential for prostate cancer.

Lower urinary tract symptoms like an interrupted urine stream or a weaker flow can be an indication of prostate cancer if the doctor has ruled out an infection. Benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) is an enlarged prostate which could produce the same symptoms as prostate cancer. Because the enlarged prostate narrows the urethra, the bladder must work harder to expel urine. Furthermore, prostate cancer favours the skeleton, which is why healthcare professionals must rule out prostate cancer when a man, especially older men, complains of back pain.

Lorraine Govender, Cansa's national manager: Health Promotion states: "The problem with a slow-growing cancer like prostate cancer is that, by the time you experience symptoms, the cancer may already be advanced. That's why it's so

crucial to undergo annual prostate screenings.”

There's a more comfortable way available now – a straightforward blood test – eliminating the need for any discomfort or awkwardness. It's a significant step forward in the realm of prostate health, offering a less invasive approach. The prostate specific antigen (PSA) blood test measures the levels of PSA, a substance produced by the prostate gland. Other than prostate cancer, higher values of PSA may indicate, enlargement, inflammation, or infection of the prostate gland.

PSA tests are available, by appointment, at Cansa Care Centres nationwide at affordable rates to assist with covering the consumables used to conduct the screening. Patients with medical aid benefits can claim from their medical aids once they have paid for the screening. Testing can also be done via local health clinics, health care practitioners if presenting with symptoms.

If a healthcare professional suspects prostate cancer due to a high PSA level, a biopsy is called for. There are three ways to perform a biopsy: trans-urethral, trans-rectal, and trans-perineal. Once diagnosed, typical treatments include the removal of one prostate lobe, brachytherapy, and external radiation. In cases where prostate cancer is already advanced, doctors usually remove the testes and start treatment with systemic hormone blockers. If hormone therapy fails, doctors often prescribe chemotherapy.

Govender adds: “If you find yourself facing a prostate cancer diagnosis, reach out to your nearby Cansa Care Centre. Our dedicated team is here to provide not just you but your loved ones with care and support, going that extra mile to ease your journey. From lending a hand with medical equipment, free tele counselling, and there are support groups, both in-person and online, and a wealth of resources to tap into. And for those having treatments far from home, there's the warm embrace of Cansa Care Homes to offer comfort.”

“And Cansa is not just about places and things; we understand the ropes of the public healthcare system and are ready to be your guide. Because in the world of prostate cancer, you're not alone, and Cansa is here to walk this path with you,” she concluded.

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