

By: Jindoo2008ru, Science Editor

Prostate Cancer Tests Still 'Inaccurate'

Two studies have found low success rates

In two new, large and randomized clinical trials, experts Otis W. Brawley, MD, from the American Cancer Society, Donna Ankerst, PhD, and Ian M. Thompson, MD, from the University of Texas Health Science Center, in San Antonio, have discovered that the efficiency of prostate cancer (PC) tests is limited at best, and nowhere near the detection rate it should have. The experts say that the existing tests haven't yet reached any of the three goals they've been designed to fulfill: reducing prostate cancer deaths, limiting the suffering patients endure, or reducing health care costs associated with treating it.

The researchers also mention that the use of the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test, since the mid-1980s, has not yet been statistically associated with a diminishing number of deaths linked to this type of cancer, which will affect one in six American males during the course of their lifetimes. The two studies conclude that there is no evidence to suggest that the reduction in the number of prostate cancer-related deaths was owed to PSA testing, and nor to other factors, such as improved health care and better treatment options, obtained through other lines of research.

"Men should discuss the now quantifiable risks and benefits of having a PSA test with their physician and then share in making an informed decision. [...] The weight of the decision should not be thrown into the patient's lap," the authors say in their work. They also add that none of the United States' largest health care institutions, including the American Cancer Society (ACS), encourages the use of the PSA test on men at an average risk of developing this type of cancer during their lifetimes.

Another danger the new paper draws attention to is over-diagnosing the disease, which means that every inconsequential abnormality that is detected by the tests is immediately referred to as cancer. The authors believe that this way of thinking is very detrimental to the health care system, as patients are then immediately labeled as "cancer patients," a name that brings with it psycho-social troubles for the men involved, as well as negative economic consequences for everyone else. Money will begin to be pumped in the individual, for various unnecessary tests, which will find nothing amiss.

"The real impact and tragedy of prostate cancer screening is the doubling of the lifetime risk of a diagnosis of prostate cancer with little if any decrease in the risk of dying from this disease," Peter Boyle, PhD., D.Sc and report Co-author Dr. Otis W. Brawley, both from the International Prevention Research Institute, in Lyon, France, say. The two experts worked on a different, but related, research to that of the American team.