

Prostate Cancer: Just the Facts – A Mandate for Patient-Centered Research

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Men's Health Network

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Our mission is to reach out to men and their families where they live, work, play and pray.

Public Policy

Achievements

Within the Indian Health Service we now have an Office of Men's Health to mirror the existing Office of Indian Women's Health, whose duty it will be to coordinate and promote the health status of Indian Men in the United States.

When we are talking about putting prostate cancer or men's health in front of lawmakers and others, we have an entity that is very friendly to our cause, the Congressional Men's Health Caucus.

Office of Men's Health Bill

The Office of Men's Health Bill (H.R. 2115) was introduced April 27th, 2009, and it would create an Office of Men's Health that would mirror the existing Office of Women's Health across the Department of Health and Human Services. We currently have five co-sponsors, and we are going to renew efforts to figure out the best path to move this legislation forward.

We need to focus on this because risks to the health and well-being of the nation's men (and families) are on the rise due to a lack of education, awareness, and pursuit of preventative screening and care, while the health crisis is of particular concern to men, it is also a concern for women regarding their fathers, husbands, sons and brothers, according to the Census Bureau, by the time men and women reach age 65, the ratio of men to women reduces to 85 to 100, according to the Administration on Aging, more than half of elderly widows now living in poverty were not poor before the death of their husbands, and finally men's health is a concern to federal and state governments, which absorb the enormous costs of premature death and disability, including the costs of caring for dependents that are left behind. With regard to prostate cancer in particular, prostate cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in the United States among men, accounting for 25 percent of all cancer cases. It is a huge problem.

There are three calls to action around prostate cancer within the Office of Men's Health Bill, which include that the Office of Men's Health would be charged with coordinating programs and activities

around prostate cancer on the national, state and local level, it would coordinate public awareness programs and activities around prostate cancer, and it would also coordinate activities and screening programs around PSA, prostate cancer and other men's health issues. This would put prostate cancer on the map when it comes to federal agencies and would provide a gatekeeper when looking for champions and partners within federal agencies to be able to have prostate cancer well represented within federal government.

Healthcare Reform

We are facing some issues with the passage of healthcare reform when it comes to prostate cancer, and one of those is the United States Preventive Services Task Force, which is the entity as we move forward with healthcare reform that is ultimately going to be relied upon for the core and basic benefits packages. The problem is that prostate cancer is given an "I" rating by the task force, which ultimately says there is insufficient evidence to support the value of prostate cancer screening. That is horrific. About 35 million men between the ages of 40 and 64 currently enjoy a prostate cancer screening benefit, and the way the current healthcare reform language is written there is no protection to provide prostate cancer screening. It is my fear that those men will potentially lose that prostate cancer screening benefit. The bigger issue is that there is no specific language in current bills to protect and encourage prostate cancer to be included and represented with a seat at the table.

These things are not a result of a lack of prostate cancer survivors and advocates on the Hill. There are at least seven prostate cancer survivors in the Senate currently. We just need to find the right people, engage them and have them be willing to stand up and talk about the issues.

We want to hold President Obama's feet to the fire with regard to prostate cancer. Prostate cancer is one of the things that is going to need to be protected, and advocates, staffers, and industry need to do that so that as healthcare reform moves forward we remind President Obama that prostate cancer needs to be protected like breast cancer, as he said.

The Democratic National Committee also passed a resolution to say that they were going to do everything they could to promote prostate cancer screening as well as testing. They are on the record, and that should provide unique opportunities in working with Democratic colleagues and friends to ensure that they are helping to protect prostate cancer.

As much as possible, we are trying to involve a new organization, Women Against Prostate Cancer, to show the other side of prostate cancer. It is a national organization that is focused on reaching out to the women and the families that are impacted by prostate cancer.