

Cancer Treatment: What's Best for You?

Advantages of Surgical Therapy for Prostate Cancer

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I. Significance of Prostate Cancer

Some people firmly believe in their prostate cancer treatment, and I always tell my patients that prostate cancer is 50 different diseases. What is right for one patient may not be right for another. It is vitally important that patients choose the right treatment for their disease. Most men found early in the course of their disease have a long and successful course, and then we have to start talking about maximizing the benefit with the least side effects.

II. Advantages of Surgical Therapy

We all know that prostate cancer is a significant disease, but we are still stuck with the problem that in America right now one in six men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer but only 3% are going to die of prostate cancer. We have to try and figure out which man's life is going to be impacted by the disease. We know there are factors that provide valid prognostic information such as the true tumor grade, tumor volume, margin status and node status.

III. Prostate Biopsy

Studies clearly indicate that if you biopsy suspicious areas and non-suspicious areas, you are much more likely to find cancer in the areas that are non-suspicious. The total volume that is removed in a standard prostate biopsy is 0.108 cc, and the mean prostate volume biopsied is 33 cc. I take out 0.36% of the prostate. That means I don't know anything about 99.6% of a patient's prostate. Then we make decisions based on this biopsy.

IV. Cancer Grade

Based on a study from 2006 where they looked at biopsies and prostatectomies, if on a patient's biopsy they had a Gleason 6, they found a Gleason 7 or more 60% of the time. We all know that a Gleason 7 indicates a much more aggressive cancer that is much more likely to impact a patient's life. If a patient had a Gleason 7 on biopsy, there is a chance that it went up 10 to 20%. It's not the biopsy result but the real result that's in the prostate that predicts survival and recurrence.

V. Advantages of Surgery

One of the main advantages of surgery is that it provides much more valid prognostic information. We get to know the true tumor grade, how much tumor is in the prostate and whether it's outside the prostate. By knowing these things, we can tell patients the

appropriateness of secondary treatment and present them with a good estimate in terms of recurrence and survival.

VI. Bill-Axelson Study

The Bill-Axelson Study published in NEJM in 2005 is the only randomized, prospective study that has ever shown in prostate cancer any advantage to treatment. In the study, 695 early-stage men were randomly assigned to watchful waiting versus prostatectomy, and there was eight-year follow up. In the eight years, there was a significant decrease in deaths due to prostate cancer at eight years. It's the first gold-standard study to show an advantage for surgical treatment. However, in the same study if you looked at the men who died of all causes, more men died in the surgery arm. The overall survival in the two groups was exactly the same. In eight years, one has to operate on seventeen men to help one, and of those seventeen there are significant side effects.