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## **Employees Should Make A Date For Their Prostate**

By: Caroline Tapp-McDougall

Okay, it's time to look at your workforce. What percentage are men? What percentage are middle-aged? How about older and closer to **retirement**? Now, for each group, how many do you think have seen their doctors in the past year?

It's likely that most of your male employees haven't seen their doctor in a while. As a result, they likely haven't been tested for the second most common cause of cancer death in men, prostate cancer. According to the Prostate Cancer Research Foundation (PCRF), all men over 40 years of age are at risk and should speak to their doctor about early detection. Men who have a family history of the disease or who are of African or Caribbean descent should be particularly cautious.

So what exactly is the prostate? Essentially, the prostate has three functions:

- it produces fluid for semen, which helps move sperm during ejaculation
- it makes prostate specific antigen (PSA)
- it controls urine flow It is divided into three internal zones – peripheral, transition, and central.

Most prostate cancer occurs in the peripheral zone.

Problems don't start, of course, until prostate cancer arrives on the scene. Extremely common, prostate cancer is found in 50 per cent of men over age 70 and in virtually all men over age 90. Most prostate cancers never cause symptoms because they spread very slowly. However, some do grow more aggressively, hence the need for all men over the age of 40 to be tested.

### **Early Screening**

Usually, prostate cancer causes no symptoms until it's in the advanced stages, which is why early screening is so vital. Employees with prostate cancer may have difficulty urinating or a need to urinate frequently, have bloody urine, or experience painful ejaculation or erectile dysfunction. In more serious cases, prostate cancer can spread to the bone or the kidneys, resulting in pain in both areas. As well, an employee may experience pain in the lower back, pelvic area, or upper thighs, or may feel weakness in their legs.

Since early detection is vital, employees should be encouraged to visit their doctor. The best screen is to have a physician perform an annual digital rectal examination and a blood test.

A PSA test, which checks for the level of a prostate-specific antigen, a protein made by the prostate gland, should also be carried out. Since prostate cancer cells are more 'leaky' than normal prostate cells, high levels of PSA can be a sign of prostate cancer.

However, a PSA test is not perfect and misses about one-third of prostate cancers. Some research studies have found that as many as 25 per cent of men with prostate cancer have PSA levels that are less than the levels indicative of prostate cancer.

Fortunately, if the doctor feels a nodule, he or she can perform an ultrasound scan. This test will determine if cancer is present and whether it is aggressive and likely to spread quickly.

**On Second Thought ...**

Prostate cancer can be treated in many ways. However, the treatments can significantly affect a man's lifestyle. Major surgery, radiation therapy, and drug therapy can cause impotence or incontinence. For these and other reasons, many employees with prostate cancer – especially older men with slow-growing, early stage cancer – decide that a 'wait and see' approach is best.

Regardless of treatment, an employee who has been diagnosed with prostate cancer may feel overwhelmed by the treatment options available. Since there is no 'one size fits all' therapy, the employee should learn as much as he can about his options. When deciding on a treatment plan, he and his doctor will consider his age, general health, and the grade and stage of cancer.

Early screening and treatment improves the longterm prognosis, but this disease does return in some cases. If it does, your employee's cancer specialists will discuss what needs to be done next.

The most important thing that you can do in the fight against prostate cancer is to encourage employees to visit their family doctors and be tested regularly. As well, educating staff (both men and women) about prostate cancer, its symptoms, and its detection will help everyone understand it and help those who may be most at risk to seek medical help.

Caroline Tapp-McDougall is the publisher of Solutions: Canada's Family Guide to Home Health Care and Wellness and the author of The Complete Canadian Eldercare Guide