

They Decided To Check

by Abram Katz | April 29, 2009 8:29 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Men don't like to do a lot of things. Prostate exams are near the top of the list. But counseled by brothers, or delivered by wives, about 85 men underwent prostate cancer screening Tuesday afternoon at the Hospital of Saint Raphael.

Hospital officials said they are not aware of any other public, free prostate screenings elsewhere in the state. St. Raphael's conducts spring and fall sessions.

For reasons that are unclear, African-American men are 61 percent more likely to develop prostate cancer than Caucasian men of the same age and background. Black men are also 2.5 times more likely to die from prostate cancer.

But getting people to find out if they have it takes extra work.

Besides feeling like the test is a waste of time, some men are apprehensive or dislike the specifics of the exam.

Men awaiting the test Tuesday were fairly calm.

"This is my second time," said Lawrence Downes, 62, of Hamden.

"The first time I had this done, two years ago, I didn't know what was going to happen. It was a little embarrassing, but coming in for the sake of your health, it's much better," he said.

"You've got to keep healthy . I just got married two years ago and I want to be functioning," Downes (pictured) said, and then laughed.

Rodrigo Marin, 55, of Derby, said his brother told him about the St. Raphael's screening. "I'm not apprehensive," he said.

The prostate is a walnut-sized gland located at the base of the bladder. Among its functions are helping to produce semen, and closing off the bladder at appropriate times.

One symptom of prostate cancer is that the back of the gland feels rough, said Augustine Okeke (pictured at the top of the story), program manager for the hospital's Project Brotherhood.

There's only one easy way to palpate the prostate, and that is through the only nearby opening.

Men feel like "supermen," Okeke said. "Nothing can happen to them."

Many men also find the rectal exam embarrassing, uncomfortable, or unpleasantly intimate.

If you think that sounds bad, gynecological exams are far more invasive and frequent, Okeke said.

"We're pushing early detection. We tend to be reactive rather than proactive. If you can catch prostate cancer early, you can cure close to 100 percent," Okeke said.

"By the time you notice symptoms it's usually too late," he said.

Some men may not want to find out if they have prostate cancer, because surgery can leave men incontinent and impotent, he said. But now there are erectile dysfunction drugs, and other ways to minimize that problem, Okeke said.

Besides, he said, untreated prostate cancer will cause similar problems and could be life-threatening.

“The exam takes six to 10 seconds and it could save decades of life,” he said.

The prostate enlarges with age, sometimes producing an irritating condition called benign prostatic hypertrophy. About 1 in 6 men develop prostate cancer. Last year about 186,000 men were diagnosed with prostate cancer, and around 28,000 died from the disease.

Approximately 2 million Americans currently live with prostate cancer, according to the Prostate Cancer Foundation.

If the tumor is discovered and treated before the cancerous cells can spread, close to 100 percent of patients will remain cancer free after five years.

“Why can’t they do research and find a cure?” Downes said.

In fact, a 17-year National Center Institute study published last month found that annual screening did not reduce deaths from prostate cancer.

“What this report tells us is that there may be some men who are diagnosed with prostate cancer and have the side-effects of treatment, such as impotence and incontinence, with little chance of benefit,” said Dr. John E. Niederhuber, director of the National Cancer Institute.

“Clearly, we need a better way of detecting prostate cancer at it’s earliest stages and as importantly, a method of determining which tumors will progress,” Niederhuber said.

Sometimes doctors opt to monitor prostate cancer rather than treat it, Okeke said. Elderly men with slowly growing tumors, for example, can often forgo treatment without ill effect, he said.

http://www.newhavenindependent.org/archives/2009/04/men_dont_like_t.php