

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

September 21, 2014

“Prostate Cancer: Is It Linked To Male Pattern Baldness”

As Americans, we are driven by shocking headlines. So, I will try to head off any panic over the new one which states, "Male Pattern Baldness Linked to Aggressive Prostate Cancer." A new study in the Journal of Clinical Oncology from the Prostate, Lung, Colorectal and Ovarian (PLCO) Cancer Screening Trial on 39,000 men has found that men with a certain type of baldness may be at a higher risk of developing aggressive prostate cancer. The increased risk was observed in men who had moderate baldness that affected both the front and the crown of their head by age 45 years, as compared with men with no baldness. But, this was not statistically significant and thus, proved nothing other than an association. When investigators split the prostate cancer cases into aggressive and nonaggressive, aggressive prostate cancer risk was increased by 40% while there was no altered risk of nonaggressive prostate cancer. So, male pattern baldness may play a small role in estimating risk of prostate cancer and may contribute to patient-doctor discussions about whether to opt for prostate cancer screening. A lead investigator said that these results are not yet practice changing and that more evidence is needed "before we can routinely consider baldness in prostate cancer screening recommendations." Still, we must not forget the seriousness of prostate cancer. In the United States there were about 240,000 new cases and 28,000 deaths from the disease in 2012. According to the American Cancer Society, one in six American men get prostate cancer at some point in their life. Between 25 and 35 percent of men aged between 30 and 49 years of age will have cancer observable in their prostate at autopsy if they die for some other reason. Some 30 percent of all men in their 50s will also have cancer observable in their prostate at autopsy and as many as 70 percent of all men in their 80s will have cancer in their prostate at autopsy. Tragically, both surgery and radiation therapy are plagued with post-treatment problems. A New England Journal of Medicine study showed how important it is for men to carefully consider treatments for early-stage prostate cancer. Fifteen years after surgery or radiation treatment, nearly all of the older men in the study had some problems having sex and about one-fifth had bladder or bowel trouble. One expert said, "Since early prostate cancers usually don't prove fatal and there are no good ways to tell which ones really need treatment, men must be realistic about side effects they might suffer."

In the America that I love, we will not have knee jerk reactions to scary headlines. Please consult your local doctor and please ask lots of questions.

Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

Surgeon/Scientist/Patient Advocate

27439 Highway 441, Kentwood, LA 70444

985-229-6955 Home | 985-229-3760 – Fax | 985-514-0578 – Cell

rhowesmd@hughes.net | www.iwillfindthecure.org

