

Position Statement on PSA Screening for Prostate Cancer

The Prostate Centre works toward providing current information about prostate health and related topics. To facilitate informed decision making for men around the issue of the PSA blood test, we recommend that men and their health care providers discuss the benefits and limitations of PSA screening. The knowledge you gain that your PSA is within normal limits for your age can be reassuring, and if the PSA result is higher than expected, it alerts you to the need for more tests to investigate further. PSA screening helps to find cancer early, before it spreads and causes symptoms, but it cannot tell how dangerous the cancer is and sometimes it can suggest you have cancer when you do not (a false positive result).

The Prostate Centre recommends that a baseline PSA test be offered to all men at the age of 50 and to men with a family history of prostate cancer at age 40. Health care providers can make men aware that an annual PSA screening test is a choice that is available to them, but it is not free of charge as the cost of a PSA screening test is not currently covered by the Medical Services Plan of British Columbia. It is important to emphasize that the PSA test is not diagnostic for prostate cancer, but is a screening tool that, when combined with the digital rectal examination (DRE), can help detect early prostate cancer. While no standard guidelines for PSA testing currently exist, it is ideal for all men to establish a baseline PSA value at age 40, when there is a minimal risk of prostate cancer and before the onset of benign prostatic hypertrophy, which is the natural process of prostate enlargement commonly associated with aging in men. If this baseline PSA result is not reason for concern, the PSA can be repeated every five years until the age of 50 and yearly for men at higher risk for prostate cancer. At age 50 all men should begin annual or semiannual PSA testing combined with a DRE, if they have not already done so.

Sources:

1. Prostate Cancer Canada Early Detection of Prostate Cancer Guidelines, 2010.
2. The American Cancer Society Prostate Cancer Early Detection Guidelines, 2010.
3. The American Urological Association Prostate-Specific Antigen Best Practice Statement; 2009 Update