

NORTHWEST SUBURBAN UROLOGY ASSOCIATES, S.C.

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Dear Patient:

A recent study published in the New England Journal of Medicine has generated a great deal of interest in both the popular press and professional circles. Nine thousand men were in a drug trial that looked at the effect of finasteride (Proscar) on the development of prostate cancer over six to seven years. Men taking the drug had fewer prostate cancers detected but also had a higher percentage of high grade or presumably more aggressive cancers.

Some important aspects of the study should be noted:

- 1) This is not the patient population that we as urologists are currently treating with Proscar. All of our patients are symptomatic in some fashion or have pathology we feel needs treatment based on some objective finding, such as elevated residual urine.
- 2) No data were presented in regard to the clinical outcome of these tumors, such as their natural history, effect on longevity, cure rate with treatment, etc. This is a report of pathologic laboratory findings only.
- 3) Many of these cancers were found in end of study biopsies, not done “for cause” (i.e., rising PSA, abnormal digital rectal examination), but simply as part of the study protocol, hence their clinical significance is unknown as they are in essence “incidental findings”.
- 4) The overall cancer detection rate in the placebo group was higher than expected for the general population, raising the possibility of over diagnosis.

In summary, we do not know whether Proscar prevented, delayed the appearance of, or treated prostate cancer. The absolute reduction in prostate cancer risk was offset by a smaller absolute increase in the risk of higher grade, presumably more aggressive disease. The drug was clearly effective in reducing voiding symptoms and adversely affected sexual functioning. As our patients on Proscar or Avodart (a very similar drug) are being treated for significant urological disease, we are not recommending an immediate cessation of treatment based on this one study. A patient currently on Proscar or Avodart should make an appointment to discuss these findings with his urologist, and if very concerned may stop the medication in the interim.

Very truly yours,

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