



Acute Health Services Division

Hospital Circular

Distribution: Public Hospitals
Private Hospitals

Subject: Prostate Cancer Screening

Purpose: To advise Public and Private Hospitals of the results of the Australian Health Technology Advisory Committee (AHTAC) review of the benefits, risks and costs of prostate cancer screening

Your attention is drawn to the work undertaken by The Australian Health Technology Advisory Committee (AHTAC), a permanent sub-committee of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to evaluate the benefits, risks and costs of screening for prostate cancer.

Prostate cancer is a significant health problem, affecting men in older age groups but controversy surrounds the appropriateness of screening for prostate cancer.

The risk factors and causes of the disease are not known. The reported *incidence* of prostate cancer has risen dramatically in Australia but *mortality rates* from the disease do not reflect this trend.

There is no clear consensus in the medical profession about screening tests and available treatment for prostate cancer. The Australian Cancer Society, the Urological Society of Australasia, the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, do not recommend prostate cancer screening. Internationally, the position of medical professional bodies on screening is divided.

After critical analysis of the scientific literature, current practice and the positions of medical professional and other bodies on prostate cancer screening, AHTAC has concluded there is no clear evidence that screening healthy, asymptomatic men for prostate cancer will make any difference to how long they will live, nor that early detection and treatment of prostate cancer will improve their quality of life.

For this reason, AHTAC does not support screening for prostate cancer. The Department of Human Services, Victoria supports and endorses the AHTAC conclusions.

Clear information should be made available to those facing decisions about testing and treatment for prostate cancer. Education programs on the risks and benefits of testing for prostate cancer and addressing the needs of the individual patient, the medical profession and the community are recommended. Men being offered or requesting the PSA test must be fully informed of the limitations of the available tests and further diagnostic and treatment choices they may face, and the implications of these, should they decide to proceed with the test.

Prostate cancer screening is a rapidly evolving area and the position on screening may change when further evidence on the effectiveness of existing tests and treatments become available. While not supporting screening at this time, AHTAC has recommended that developments in screening tests and treatment for prostate cancer should be closely monitored.

For further information contact Dr Heather Buchan, Manager, Health Care Evaluation, Public Health Branch on (03) 9616 7308



**DR CW BROOK
DIRECTOR
PUBLIC HEALTH**



**DR M WALSH
DIRECTOR
ACUTE HEALTH**