

Web-based program could ease treatment decisions for prostate cancer patients

May 15 2007



A team of MCG researchers is testing a Web-based program that provides prostate cancer patients with information about different treatment approaches. Researchers, including Dr. Gerald Bennett, principal investigator and chair of the Department of Health Environments and Systems in the MCG School of Nursing and Dr. Rosalind Jones, co-investigator, study coordinator and assistant professor of nursing, believe that the program may make treatment decisions easier. Credit: Medical College of Georgia

A Web-based program that provides prostate cancer patients with information about different treatment approaches may make deciding which path to follow a little easier, Medical College of Georgia researchers say.

Treatments for localized prostate cancer and associated side effects are so varied that patients are often confused about which option is best for

them, says Dr. Gerald Bennett, chair of the Department of Health Environments and Systems in the MCG School of Nursing.

"This disease can be treated by observation alone, surgery, cryosurgery, hormonal therapy and radiation therapies," Dr. Bennett says. "But there have only been a few studies that adequately compare the complications of different treatments, which can include sexual, bladder and bowel dysfunction. Men can hear their doctors' recommendations, but ultimately, they decide which treatment to pursue. Those decisions can dramatically affect their lives, but the bottom line is that we often don't know enough scientifically to recommend one treatment over the other."

MCG is part of a National Institutes of Health-funded study to determine the impact of the Personal Patient Profile Prostate (P4) program, an innovative computer program that measures personal factors and creates an Internet decision-support system.

Led by the University of Washington in Seattle, the other sites are Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia and the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio. Nearly 500 patients will be included in the study nationwide.

In Augusta, Dr. Bennett and his research team will recruit 72 prostate cancer patients from the Augusta Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Half of those men will follow a traditional treatment plan – diagnosis followed by a consultation with a cancer specialist and treatment. The other half will use the P4 program.

"These men will go to the Web site and answer questions like who they feel should be responsible for making treatment decisions – their doctor, themselves or a combination of the two – and the program will provide video examples of how to approach those discussions with their care providers," Dr. Bennett says. "We believe men who have access to the

P4 program will have less inner conflict while making treatment decisions and, in the long run, will be more satisfied with whatever treatment path they choose."

"I often see patients struggle with treatment decisions," adds Dr .Martha Terris, urologist at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Augusta and the Medical College of Georgia. "While a program like this one doesn't make the treatment decision for them, it does help them make better informed decisions and further open the lines of communication with their doctors."

Source: Medical College of Georgia

Citation: Web-based program could ease treatment decisions for prostate cancer patients (2007, May 15) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2007-05-web-based-ease-treatment-decisions-prostate.html>

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