



# Prostate tests urged for men in 40s

Advocacy group recommends early baseline screening

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Prostate Cancer Canada is recommending that men get baseline PSA testing in their 40s, sparking renewed debate on the controversial issue of when and even if healthy men should be screened for the disease.

The advocacy organization is issuing recommendations on early screening for prostate cancer — the most common cancer in Canadian men with one in seven being diagnosed — on Wednesday.

Establishing a baseline PSA value for men in their 40s would help in identifying future risk of prostate cancer, states an advance copy of the recommendations obtained by the

Star. The prostate-specific antigen test detects abnormalities in the prostate gland.

“Once you understand what that baseline test score is, you have a better sense, working with your GP, of what a (PSA) testing program should be for the individual — whether it is two years, whether it is five years or 10 years,” said Dr. Stuart Edmonds, vice president of research for the organization.

Nationally and internationally there is a lack of consensus on when and if men should get PSA tests. Studies on the issue have yielded divergent results.

The U.S. Preventative Services Task Force in 2011 issued a controversial recommendation against screening for prostate cancer in healthy men.

In Ontario, the provincial government recommends against population-wide mass screening tests for

early detection of prostate cancer in healthy men.

“Currently, there is no definitive evidence that public screening for early detection of PSA results in improved patient outcomes,” said Samantha Grant, press secretary to Ontario Health Minister Deb Matthews.

(OHIP covers the cost of PSA tests for men already diagnosed with prostate cancer and those suspected of having it.)

Guidelines issued by the Canadian Urological Association in 2011 call for PSA testing to be offered to all men 50 or older with at least a 10-year life expectancy.

But many consider those guidelines out of date, including Dr. Laurence Klotz, who helped write them. He is chief of urology at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre.

He’s in favour of men getting PSA tests in their 40s.

“I think it’s a good idea, not annually but once,” he said.

But he hastily added that early screening must be married to conservative management of prostate cancer in about half of men who are diagnosed with the disease.

That’s because, in most men, prostate cancer is very slow-growing. Studies have shown that most of those diagnosed do not die from it.

“If one can be very scrupulous about overtreatment, then it is very reasonable to screen,” Klotz said.

There is much concern about over diagnosis and overtreatment of the disease, especially among older men. Treatment can lead to anxiety and problems such as incontinence and erectile dysfunction.

Prostate Cancer Canada is also recommending that men at high risk for the disease talk to their doctor before 40 about when to get a PSA test.