

In the news

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION?

Data reported at the American Urological Association's annual meeting suggest that two drugs already approved for other indications might help prevent prostate cancer.

Rodney Breau and colleagues at the Mayo Clinic, USA, found that men who took statins (currently used to lower cholesterol) were less likely to develop prostate cancer. The study followed 2,447 men aged 40–79 from 1990 onwards. Of those taking statins, 6% were diagnosed with prostate cancer, a threefold reduced risk compared with non-statin users. Breau emphasized that the data were still preliminary, a point also stressed by John Neate, Chief Executive of The Prostate Cancer Charity: “It is too soon to say if the results of [this] stud[y] could lead to a potential breakthrough in the use of statins to reduce the risk of prostate cancer....” ([BBC News](#), 26 Apr 2009.)

Phase III data on GlaxoSmithKline's drug Avodart (dutasteride, currently used as a treatment for benign prostate enlargement) in prostate cancer prevention were also presented. The study examined 8,121 men aged 50–75 with high prostate-specific antigen levels and found that over 4 years dutasteride significantly reduced the risk of biopsy-detectable prostate cancer by 23% compared with a placebo. Malcom Mason, of Cardiff University, UK, said that “This is a significant and encouraging breakthrough” but also noted that “The four years taken on this trial is a comparatively short time. We now need to find out how many people die using this treatment over a ten or twenty year period.” ([The Times](#), 27 Apr 2009.) William Catalona, of Northwestern University, USA, raised concerns that dutasteride might not work as well in more aggressive tumours, and that hormone therapy such as this “will temporarily make things look good” and thus mask the problem ([The Associated Press](#), 27 Apr 2009).

Sarah Seton-Rogers