# In the news

## MAKING WAVES

Sound waves could offer an alternative treatment for early-stage prostate cancer, with fewer side effects than the standard surgery or radiotherapy treatments.

The trial, published in the *British Journal of Cancer*, treated 172 men in the United Kingdom with High Intensity Focused Ultrasound (HIFU), which heats tissue to 80–90°C and kills the cancer cells. A year later 159 men were followed up and 92% had no recurrence of their cancer.

HIFU is an attractive treatment because it leads to shorter hospital stays and fewer side effects than standard treatments. On average, men receiving HIFU were discharged after 5 hours. Surgery typically requires a 2–3 day hospital stay and radiotherapy requires daily outpatient treatments for up to a month. No patients had bowel problems, <1% had incontinence and around one-third had impotence. With surgery or radiotherapy, up to 20% of patients have incontinence and half experience impotence.

Guy MacPherson, a participant in the trial, was pleased with the HIFU treatment. "The day following the treatment I was walking the dog, washing the car and going Christmas carolling," he said (*BBC News*, 1 Jul 2009).

These results are promising, and the technique is already in use in other parts of Europe and Japan, but experts caution that more data are needed before HIFU is put into widespread use for treating prostate cancer. Hashim Ahmed, who led the trial, said, "We don't yet know for sure if HIFU is more effective than traditional treatments so it will be important to carry out further studies involving a larger number of patients, followed over a longer period of time to truly compare the long-term effectiveness of this treatment." (*The Times*, 2 Jul 2009.)

Around 800 men have entered additional trials in the United Kingdom, and the technique is being tested on other cancers.

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