

PROSTATE CANCER BIOPSY—IT'S STRESSFUL!

In this era of high-volume screening for prostate cancer, approximately 40% of men who had an initial negative biopsy will be rebiopsied within 5 years, which is a considerable number of procedures. New research reported in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* has examined the psychological impact biopsy has in men, showing that those who experience problematic biopsy-related adverse effects are particularly affected by stress and anxiety.

More than 1,100 men recommended to undergo prostate biopsy as part of the Prostate Testing for Cancer and Treatment (ProtecT) trial were included, completing questionnaires at the time biopsy was recommended, immediately before the procedure and at 7 days and 35 days after. Anxiety and depressive symptoms were measured using a validated score, and post-biopsy physical symptoms (for example, pain, fever, haematuria) were also recorded.

“We found that most men described prostate biopsies as ‘uncomfortable’, but around 40% reported pain and many experienced bleeding, which sometimes lasted for 5 weeks or longer,” explains lead investigator Jenny Donovan at the University of Bristol, UK. Most of these men considered these issues minor. However, approximately 11% of those with pain, 22% of those with fever and 26% of those with haemoejaculate considered these issues moderate or major. “We found that the men who described post-biopsy symptoms as ‘problematic’ 7 days after biopsy also experienced raised anxiety compared with men with minor symptoms,” says Donovan.

These findings suggest that not only is a cancer diagnosis stressful (indeed, 13% of men who had a diagnosis by day 35 had elevated anxiety), but so is the process leading up to it, especially if biopsy-related complications are experienced. Given the contentious nature of screening, these data might help in the design of effective information sheets or decision-support tools for patients. Indeed, Donovan and colleagues have this in mind: “We intend to investigate whether having clear information about the possible consequences of biopsy reduces anxiety and adverse effects of biopsies, and whether it affects the number of men willing to be tested.”

Mina Razzak

Original article Wade, J. et al. Psychological impact of prostate biopsy: physical symptoms, anxiety, and depression. *J. Clin. Oncol.* doi:10.1200/JCO.2012.45.4801