

PHAROS

A beacon of hope in the darkness

Newsletter of the Reading Prostate Cancer Support Group (RPCSG)

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THE SEPTEMBER MEETING

55 people including two new members, attended the September meeting, at which there was an interesting talk by Nikki Hayward. Nikki is part of Cancer Research UK Oxford Centre, and her role is promoting awareness of Cancer Research UK, raising awareness of early symptoms of cancer, and helping the prevention of cancer. She has spoken to many cancer support groups previously.

Nikki first explained what cancer is, and said that 1 person in 2 will suffer from cancer at some time of their lives. Cancer is caused by damage to cells. Cells are continually dividing, but with cells dying the amount of cells normally remains stable. Some startling statistics showed that in the few minutes since Nikki started her talk, the body has produced 300 million new blood cells. Cancer occurs when DNA becomes damaged and cells increase in quantity and cause the development of a tumour. Factors thought to increase the risk of cancer include environmental, inheritance and viruses.

Nikki visits places such as factories and businesses to spread awareness of the risks and symptoms of cancer. Prostate cancer accounts for one quarter of cancers in men and is the second biggest cause of cancer death in men, lung cancer being the biggest.

Survival rates have improved markedly. Fifty years ago just over 2 in every 10 men with prostate cancer survived for 10 years, whereas now the rate is about 8 in 10 surviving for 10 years, and this can be attributed to better diagnosis.

Nikki then described trials. Early Phase Trials are designed to find the safe dose for a new drug.

Targeted treatments are designed to interfere with the specific molecules that we know are altered in cancer. They cause fewer side effects and improve the rate of survival.

Developing new cancer drugs is very expensive and so much collaboration takes place. Drug companies, academic institutions, the NHS and charities work together to discover new treatments.

Exciting research is on-going into immunotherapy as a treatment for cancer. This is where the body's immune system is stimulated to recognise and destroy the cancer naturally.

Nikki has a video on Early Phase Cancer Trials, but we could unfortunately not view it as we had no internet access. You can watch this video anyway at this web page:

<https://vimeo.com/angelsharp/review/135988010/6e488e0828>

Late Phase Trials recruit many more patients and take much longer to reach their conclusions, the focus remaining on targeted therapies. These trials give a combination of targeted drugs and chemotherapy to patients with and without a specific mutation and comparing results over time, to inform future research.

Nikki then described the 'Add Aspirin' trial. This adds aspirin to normal treatment regimes for patients having potentially curative treatment but who are at high risk of relapse. A very large phase 3, placebo controlled, randomised study is being tried in several tumour types. Aspirin inhibits a signalling pathway, primarily focusing on inflammatory response. It is being used in many cancer treatments including prostate, bowel and lung cancers.

RECENT REPORT - A NEW TEST FOR PROSTATE CANCER

Much work is taking place to find predispositions to cancer, and biological markers associated with prostate cancer, genetic predisposition and disease behaviour.

Nikki described stereotactic radiotherapy, which is a form of radiotherapy involving a higher dose of radiation for a shorter time, that reduces side effects. A trial is taking place that compares surgery, conventional radiotherapy and stereotactic radiotherapy for localised prostate cancer.

The Human Genome Project is a huge project to identify the set of genes in a cell, and so help researchers to interpret the genetic changes in people with cancer. This should help future research and lead to the development of new and more effective treatments.

In reply to questions from the audience, Nikki said that with respect to the added aspirin, doses being used in trials are 75 mg, 100 mg and 300 mg in order to establish the optimum dose.

The time taken after a successful trial of a drug, to obtaining approval by NICE, is difficult to define precisely, but could be around 5 to 10 years. This is because NICE has to evaluate a vast amount of drugs for all types of diseases, and then the drug has to be shown to be effective for many people.

Stereotactic radiotherapy uses stronger radiation that is focused on the tumour. The side effects are similar to standard radiotherapy but less damage is caused to surrounding tissue. A big advantage is that the treatment time is only about 5 days instead of 6 weeks. This type of treatment is expected to become more widely available over the next few years.

Nikky was thanked for her very interesting talk, and was presented with a bouquet of flowers as a token of appreciation.

A newspaper article has given information on a new test for prostate cancer. This is exciting as it only needs a few drops of blood and is inexpensive and simple. Researchers believe that the test could be on sale in as little as two years and could lead to all men being routinely tested for prostate cancer. It only needs a few drops of blood on a gold plated piece of glass and should be better at detecting the disease than the current test. The current PSA test can give incorrect results as there is more than one type of PSA and the test cannot distinguish between them, whereas the new test picks out only the type of PSA that indicates prostate cancer, by looking for specific sugar molecules found in the PSA produced by men with the disease. It is too early to say how effective the new test will be, but researchers are confident that it will be more accurate. You can read the whole article at this web page:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-3152935/Golden-chance-save-prostate-cancer-victims-Glass-chip-needs-drops-blood-better-detecting-disease-current-test-say-researchers.html>

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

THE OCTOBER GROUP MEETING

The meeting on the 2nd October will feature a talk by Kate Slater of Macmillan, who will talk about the State Benefits available to cancer patients.

THE NOVEMBER GROUP MEETING

The speaker at the meeting of 6th November will be Keith Cass, who is the founder member of the Red Socks Campaign. He will talk about 'Living Well With Prostate Cancer' including the side effects of hormone therapy and IADT (Intermittent Androgen Deprivation Therapy).

THE DECEMBER GROUP MEETING

The meeting on the 4th December will be our annual Christmas Social event, which is

always a very popular and enjoyable event.
More detail of this occasion will be available
later.

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