

PHAROS

A beacon of hope in the darkness

Newsletter of the Reading Prostate Cancer Support Group (RPCSG)

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THE NOVEMBER MEETING

The November meeting was very well attended by 61 people, including one new member. The guest speaker was Martin Christlieb of the Medical Research Centre.

Martin works for the University of Oxford, in the department of Oncology. Oncology is the study of solid tumours. There are about 500 scientists working in this department, each with their own specialty area. They are working towards creating tomorrow's medicine.

The Medical Research Council is funded by both the Chancellor using public money, and by Cancer Research UK.

Martin gave a most informative and interesting talk on the work of the Oncology department, and in particular the working of cells, the reasons why they turn into cancer cells, and the work that is ongoing to defeat cancer. The mechanism of cells is a complex subject, but Martin made the subject very understandable by the audience, and his talk was accompanied by a set of very well prepared slides, which illustrated the main points of his talk.

Martin said that an innovative approach to the understanding of cancer, came about after a discussion among some professionals. They decided to investigate the characteristics of cancer cells, and drew up a list of 10 characteristics, as an aid to understanding what makes a cancer cell, and to understand what they are doing. Research focuses on undermining these characteristics.

The body controls the amount of normal cells, by issuing 'hold' commands and 'divide' commands to the cells. Cancer cells create their own divide signal, and so multiply in an uncontrolled manner. Every cell in the body contains the entire pattern of the body's

DNA, that sometimes becomes damaged during division. The body's immune system normally detects and destroys such abnormal cells. However cancer starts when some of the abnormal cells hide themselves from the immune system by disabling the immune response, and are thus able to divide and form a tumour. It has been found that cancer cells have immune system cells inside them, and the reason why the immune cells do not attack the cancer, is an area that is currently being investigated.

A further defence that cancer cells possess, concerns 'division counting'. Every cell in the body has a limited number of divisions, and when the number has been used up, the cell dies. Cancer cells are able to disable the counter mechanism.

Cancer starts with a small resistance to treatments, that is passed on to other cells. As the cells multiply, the nature of the mutation can change, so that eventually a tumour usually has a much different population to that at the start of the growth. Tumours are slightly different in different people, and have different responses, so treatment should be tailored to each person.

An approach to treat cancer is to identify the root cause of the cancer, and then develop a therapy for it. Radiotherapy is often successful in treating cancer.

Prostate cancer can be hereditary, as partially damaged cells can be passed down.

Three areas of research are being investigated:

- New drugs, with work ongoing to define useful proteins.
- Developing Radiotherapy to make it more effective.
- Development of surgical techniques.

Chemotherapies are being designed that work by damaging DNA. Cells with damaged DNA cannot divide.

Developments are also taking place using viruses, that can be used either to destroy cells, or to make cancer cells display a marker of infection, enabling the immune system to destroy them.

Martin was thanked for his very interesting and informative presentation, and presented with a gift of appreciation.



A photograph of Martin during his talk



POSSIBLE RESTRICTIONS ON SOME INSTANCES OF PSA TESTING

The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges had been asked to identify ways in which the NHS can save money. Experts from 11 specialties have identified 40 procedures that they say are not always necessary. One of the identified areas is PSA testing, where the Academy said that unless you are at risk because of race or family history, having a test for PSA is not necessary, as it does not lead to a longer life. The findings of the Academies was featured on the BBC News channel on the 24th October 2016. Heather Blake of the charity Prostate Cancer UK was interviewed, and she agreed that the PSA test is not sufficiently accurate to form a national screening programme, but said that all men over the age of 50 should be entitled to the test if they desire, after consulting their GP. She said that men at greater risk, such as a black origin, or men with a family history of prostate cancer, are encouraged to talk to their GPs from the age of 45.

Professor Chris Eden, a consultant urologist at Royal Surrey County hospital in Guildford, is alarmed by the advice from the Academies. He said that "There is no scientific evidence to back this up, in fact the opposite is true".

PCUK has devoted a page to this subject, that you can read at this web page:
<http://prostatecanceruk.org/about-us/news-and-views/2016/10/academy-of-medical-royal-colleges-questions-use-of-psa-test>

You can see the full list of 40 'unnecessary' treatments as advised by the Royal Colleges, at this web page:
<http://www.choosingwisely.co.uk/i-am-a-clinician/recommendations/#1476654326462-140275b8-1d63>

The recommendation for PSA tests is under the tab for 'The Royal College of Pathologists'.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

2nd DECEMBER 2016

This will be the annual Christmas Social buffet meal, to be held in the St Andrews Church Hall. There will be a hot and cold buffet, a quiz and a raffle. Arrival time is 6:30 p.m. and the meal is expected to be shortly after 7:00 p.m.

6th JANUARY 2017

As with all January meetings, there will be no guest speaker, as the attendance is usually reduced, on account of the Christmas festivities, and recovery from them! The meeting will be a chance to have informal chats with other members. One of the committee members will give a short information talk about the help available to patients and carers, and the PCUK Community site.

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