

PHAROS

A beacon of hope in the darkness

Newsletter of the Reading Prostate Cancer Support Group (RPCSG)

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Website: www.rpcsg.org.uk

THE JANUARY MEETING

Although the January meeting happened to be New Year's Day, there was a good attendance of 15 people at the meeting. Thanks to those who were able to attend. Refreshments were available as usual, and it was a good opportunity for members to talk among themselves.

THE FEBRUARY MEETING

The guest speaker at the February meeting was previously announced as a mystery speaker, and it was our previous chairman Dr Steve Allen. A total of 67 people attended this meeting, which is a very good turnout indeed. Steve now works with Prostate Cancer UK and is well travelled, giving awareness and information presentations to a wide range of audiences.

Steve gave us a slide show on various topics, and related his experiences. The slide show was quite stunning and very professional, including several sound and vision videos. The RPCSG group was first approached by Radio Berkshire some years ago, when they were seeking someone to talk about prostate cancer. Steve was the chairman at the time and volunteered to do the job, and since then has been a guest on the programme many times, not only on prostate cancer, but on many other diverse topics as well.

The following is a summary of the topics that he covered.

It is important for men to talk about any urinary problems - something that many men are reluctant to do, particularly men of Afro-Caribbean origin. It is essential for men in that group to have a discussion with

their GP, as they have a threefold increase in their risk of prostate cancer. The reason for this is not known.

Symptoms will not necessarily indicate prostate cancer, there may be other causes such as prostatitis, or an enlarged prostate gland.

The risk of prostate cancer is increased by 2½ times if a father or brother has had prostate cancer, or if a mother or sister has had breast cancer. Also the risk increases over the age of 50.

Steve then showed a video titled 'Be prostate cancer aware - 2 minutes to save a man's life', that was produced by Prostate Cancer UK, whose theme was the need to talk about symptoms and diagnosis. The video can be seen at this web page: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygoQ_kWf5ZQ

Steve then told us of the work that he carries out for PC UK (the charity Prostate Cancer UK), that is mainly holding awareness sessions, some of them to quite large audiences, and has included building contractors, a bus company, and a prison. Some members of his audiences have been quite young, so the benefit is not only for them in the future, but also for their relatives.

Support is not only provided by professionals, it can also be found in partners, friends and help lines. Support before treatment can be as important as during treatment.

Steve has seen many changes since his open prostatectomy. The open radical surgery is now obsolete, in favour of robotic assisted laparoscopic surgery. Brachytherapy has become more common and is the most

widely used localised treatment, and is now an option for bilateral treatment (when the tumour is in both halves of the gland). HIFU and cryotherapy can be used for small single sided tumours, however more evidence of their effectiveness is needed. Progress has also been made with external beam radiotherapy, in that conformal fields are now used, that cause less damage to surrounding healthy tissue. Also radium 223 is being more frequently used. Hormone treatment can be used as a pre-treatment before surgery or brachytherapy. Statins used with hormones have been found to decrease cancer risk.

Steve then told us of his visions for future developments:

- Better screening should come along, using biomarkers such as PCA3, EN2, and more effective blood tests.
- Better differentiation of aggressive/non aggressive cancer
- Genetics could benefit both detection and treatments.
- WBDWI (Whole Body Diffusion-Weighted Imaging) scans will give better identification of cancer sites, particularly in the bones.
- More sophisticated MRI scanning
- More use of PET (Positron Emission Tomography) scans, that are much better than MRI at detecting secondaries in soft tissue.

Steve was thanked for his excellent talk, and presented with a gift of appreciation.

CANCER SNIFFING DOGS

During Steve's talk, he mentioned the use of dogs for detecting cancer, and in particular the smelling of prostate cancer in urine samples. There are stories about dogs sniffing areas of their owner's skin that later turn out to be cancerous, and it is interesting to look a little further into this.

It is claimed that dogs can detect the presence of lung, bowel and breast cancer by sniffing a person's breath, and by sniffing urine samples can detect prostate cancer, and tumours in the bladder and kidneys. It is thought that cancer cells have some volatile compounds that the dogs can detect. Dogs have a sense of smell that is tens of thousands of times more acute than humans'. Attempts have been made to build

an electronic device that can detect the odours that a dog can detect, but so far electronic detection methods are not sufficiently sensitive, being only capable of measuring components of a sample to an accuracy of one in a million or so, whereas a dog can detect to a level of about 1 in a trillion.

The internationally renowned charity Medical Detection Dogs is involved in training dogs to carry out the sniffing, and are experimenting with different breeds of dogs. Early trials have found that the dogs can achieve a diagnostic accuracy of around 93%, that is more accurate than the PSA test. They cannot however, tell us the degree of aggressiveness of the cancer.

A trial is being run by Medical Detection Dogs, in conjunction with Milton Keynes Hospital NHS trust. If the trial is a success, canine screening will be offered to men for free at two clinics funded by charities. These are the Leighton Hospital, part of the Mid Cheshire Foundation trust, paid for by the Prostate Cancer Support Group, and the Graham Fulford Charitable Trust in Warwick.

The following web page gives some interesting facts about the use of dogs for detecting early prostate cancer, and contains a link to a video:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-3189903/Dogs-sniff-prostate-cancer-detect-tumours-93-accuracy.html>

There is a video on youtube about the work of the Medical Detection Dogs, that is interesting and only two minutes long:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2g1MMp0WLRU>

The following web page is from the website of Medical Detection Dogs, and gives a good description of the role of sniffer dogs for prostate cancer:

<https://www.medicaldetectiondogs.org.uk/866-2/>



A detection dog sniffing a sample

FUTURE EVENTS

On the 18th March 2016 we will hold an awareness stand in the Broad Street Mall in Reading. We will be located at the bottom of the escalators and our job is to hand out information about prostate cancer, and to engage in conversation with anyone who shows an interest. We will operate in four shifts each of two hour's duration. We will be most grateful for volunteers for this activity. Please contact me if you will be able to help out.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

4th March 2016

The March group meeting in St Andrews church hall at 6:30 p.m. Agenda is the AGM, followed by a talk by two of the urology nurses, Beverley and Tessa, with opportunity for the audience to put any questions to them.

18th March 2016

An awareness session at the Broad Street Mall (See above).

1st APRIL 2016

The April group meeting in St Andrews church hall at 6:30 p.m. A guest speaker is being arranged.

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