

PHAROS

A beacon of hope in the darkness

Newsletter of the Reading Prostate Cancer Support Group (RPCSG)

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THE SEPTEMBER MEETING.

Our September RPCSG meeting was held using Zoom with the guest speaker being Mr Paul Hadway, a consultant at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. He gave a very informative talk with slides about erectile dysfunction (ED) and following is an account of his talk. This talk was well attended by a total of 49 participants including partners and members of some other prostate cancer support groups.

Mr Hadway first defined erectile dysfunction as being 'Persistent inability to achieve and maintain an erection sufficient for satisfactory sexual performance'. The mechanism of erection is a complex interplay between many physical and psychological processes.

The penis consists of two structures known as corpora cavernosa that are side-by-side and the urethra runs below these two erectile bodies. Each cavernosa consists of a honeycomb of spaces with muscular walls. The penis is supplied with blood by an artery and blood flows back into the blood circulatory system via veins. When a penis is flaccid the rate of blood flowing into the cavernosa spaces matches that flowing out via the veins. An erection occurs when there is stimulation either visual or tactile and this causes the release of a neurotransmitter. In turn the muscular walls surrounding the erectile spaces relax allowing more blood to flow into the cells than flows out and the extra blood causes the erectile spaces to enlarge and cause the erection.

Nerve damage during prostatectomy is a cause of erectile dysfunction. It is a difficult job to preserve the nerves during a prostatectomy.

Mr Hadway showed a graph of the main causes of ED, which in order of the most frequent first, are vascular disease, diabetes, nerve disorder (e.g. Parkinson's disease) and then pelvic surgery or injury, and the least frequent cause was medications and substance abuse.

Cases of erectile dysfunction should be investigated as it can have other causes than prostate cancer treatment, such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease.

The first line treatment for ED is drugs in tablet form known as PDE5 inhibitors. These tablets lead to an increase in calcium that then leads to relaxation of muscles and an increase in blood flow into the erectile tissue of the penis and help to achieve an erection. The NHS has a list of conditions under which men can be prescribed such tablets and prostatectomy and prostate radiotherapy are included.

It is recommended that a patient tries each of the tablets in turn to find the one that works the best for the patient. With the exception of Cialis the tablets are effective for up to 4 hours, whereas Cialis is effective for about 17 hours. All the tablets are effective about 30 minutes after taking the dose. The tablets and their range of doses are:

Viagra (Sildenafil) 25 - 100 mg
Cialis (Tadalafil) 5 - 20 mg
Levitra (Vardenafil) 5 - 20 mg (particularly good for diabetic men)
Spedra (Avanafil) 50 - 200 mg

It is recommended that a man tries 8 tablets of each type before moving on to another type. It is unlikely that they will be effective in cases where surgery removes the nerves around the prostate.

Other remedies are:

- Alprostadil injections, also known as Caverject. Alprostadil bypasses the nerve route and is injected directly into the cavernosa and causes relaxation of the muscles. It is effective for about 70% of men. It is effective after about 10 minutes and the effect lasts for about one hour.
- MUSE is a different application of Alprostadil. It uses a small plastic device with a short tube that is inserted into the end of the penis to deliver a pellet of Alprostadil about 2cm down into the urethra.
- Prostheses can be surgically implanted into the penis, these are either malleable rods or inflatable tubes that are inflated by a small pump installed in the scrotum.
- Vacuum pumps can obtain erections and are also useful for stretching the penis to help to avoid retraction and scarring that can occur in a penis that has not been erect for more than a year or two.

There were then a few questions from the participants. A question concerned whether Prostab suppresses testosterone, which it does and it would take a few months for testosterone levels to return to normal after stopping Prostab treatment.

A question concerned the side effects of the four tablets already mentioned. These are possibly headaches, facial flushing or heartburn. Cialis can also cause backache or blurred vision. A member had suffered from a problem with pixellated vision. Mr Hadway said that these side effects are temporary issues.

Mr Hadway was thanked for his very useful talk.

Editors note: Prostate Cancer UK has produced a useful booklet titled 'Prostate Cancer And Your Sex Life' that contains information on ED remedies. This can be found for download from their web page:

<https://prostatecanceruk.org/prostate-information/our-publications/publications/prostate-cancer-and-your-sex-life>

This can be either ordered as a hard copy, or more environmentally friendly is to click the 'download' option and read it on your device. The hard copy comes with a DVD of six men's stories but you can view these and other videos at this youtube page:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNsvm8Sr1Bs&list=PL1E-4A23O0jx7OLsfqU7WyRERBExOrO-J>

NEXT RPCSG ZOOM MEETING - 2nd October 2020

The next RPCSG Zoom meeting will be held on Friday 2nd October when the guest speaker will be Andrew Doggart of the Royal Berkshire Hospital. He is a Physicist and runs the Brachytherapy treatments at the RBH. He will talk about how the unit operates and the way in which treatments are performed.

RPCSG OCTOBER WALK

The October walk will be on Tuesday 6th October 2020 and will be a repeat of a previous walk that was very popular, from Aldermaston Wharf to Woolhampton.

The October walk will start at 10:45 from a free car park at Aldermaston Wharf, near to Aldermaston railway station. We will walk for 2 miles along the river Kennet to Woolhampton, where there will be a choice depending upon the preferences of the participants. We could walk back to Aldermaston Wharf or we could continue to Thatcham and then return to Aldermaston by train from Thatcham station. Whatever the choice the walk will be about four or five miles. There will be a refreshment stop along the way, and in view of the coronavirus situation you are advised to bring your own refreshments.

To arrive at the starting point, approach Aldermaston on the A4 Bath Road, then take the A340 Basingstoke Road for about 500 metres then turn right into Station Road. Then take the first left turn into Mallard Way and immediately on the right is a free car park. If you use a sat nav with destination RG7 4UX, this will take you into Mallard Way but make sure to take the immediate right turn into the car park after turning off Station Road.

All members are invited to this walk. Just arrive at the Mallard Way car park before 10:45.

If you have any queries about the walk please call Richard Brown on 07973 662925.

Previous walk.

We had an enjoyable walk in September starting in Pangbourne with 13 people taking part, walking to Goring. The weather was perfect and we returned to Pangbourne by a short train ride from Goring.

Photographs taken during the walk:



A convenient place for refreshments

COFFEE MORNINGS

The September coffee meeting was held again at the Flower Pot in Aston. There was some last-minute confusion due to a change in the Government rules on social distancing. However we concluded that we could proceed with the meeting provided that we had groups of no more than six people each, but also believed that as a support group we were exempt from the 'group of six' rule.

The meeting went ahead and a pleasant event was held in the garden of The Flower Pot.

Dependent upon the coronavirus rules in the future we intend to hold a further coffee morning on the 15th October 2020. I will advise all members nearer to the time about whether we can hold this coffee meeting and will confirm the details.

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY.

Friday 2nd October 2020 will be a Zoom group meeting with guest speaker Andrew Daggart talking about brachytherapy treatments at the RBH.

Tuesday 6th October 2020 will be an RPCSG walk from Aldermaston Wharf to Woolhampton.

Tuesday 20th October 2020 A coffee morning - **to be confirmed dependent upon coronavirus rules!**