Dispatch: Cut It Out: No, Actually Don’t

By ACSH Staff — September 2, 2010

We’ve said it more than once, but we’ll say it again — and this time, a powerful, new study agrees with us: men with early, probably non-aggressive prostate cancer (determined by lower PSA levels and the presence of low-grade tumor pathology) can safely postpone surgery. The study, published in the Journal of Urology, found no significant difference in adverse outcomes between 2,344 men with low-risk cancer who underwent prompt surgery and 222 men who underwent surgery after a period of “active surveillance,” during which time patients defer prostate cancer treatment and undergo monitoring with regular PSA blood tests and digital rectal exams instead.

Researchers found that long-term survival was nearly the same in both groups, with 0.9 percent of men in the delayed-surgery group dying after an eight year follow-up compared to 0.7 percent of men in the immediate surgery group.

This new study adds further weight to ACSH’s longstanding skepticism about overly aggressive treatments — especially radical surgery — for prostate cancer. ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan has been advocating this approach for years. “I began writing about this 18 years ago, and my advice to men and their loved ones has always been the same: slow down before you make a decision and consider other options before undergoing surgery and radiation.”

One of our Dispatch readers, who was diagnosed with prostate cancer in the past year, commends Dr. Whelan and ACSH for our sound advice:

I just read your comments online, urging men who are diagnosed with prostate cancer to think carefully through their options. I couldn’t agree more. Thank you for lending the voice of reason to what, for many men and their families, is a confusing and troubling issue. And thank you for all the good work and essential messages you and your colleagues at ACSH convey to us all.