Psychosocial Trajectories of Men Monitoring Prostate-Specific Antigen Levels Following Surgery for Prostate Cancer

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The American Cancer Society (ACS, 2014) estimated that 233,000 new cases of prostate cancer will be diagnosed and 29,480 men will die from this disease in 2014. Prostate cancer is the most common noncutaneous cancer in men, particularly older men, and the second leading cause of death from cancer among men in the United States (ACS, 2014). For men diagnosed with localized prostate cancer, treatment strategies include active surveillance, radiation therapy, cryotherapy, surgery, and prostatectomy. A study of 11,892 men enrolled in the Cancer of the Prostate Strategic Urologic Research Endeavor database, a national registry of men with prostate cancer, found that 50% (n = 5,931) of participants underwent prostatectomy for their disease (Cooperberg, Broering, & Carroll, 2010).

After prostatectomy, prostate-specific antigen (PSA) values are used to provide information about potential progression or recurrence. Dinnes, Hewison, Altman, and Deeks (2012) reviewed guidelines from nine organizations and reported the lack of systematic guidelines to monitor treated patients. Some studies used any detectable PSA, and others used PSA doubling time. In a review of the monitoring role of PSA, Payne and Cornford (2011) reported that PSA doubling time can determine risk for clinical progression in men who experience a rise in PSA results postprostatectomy. You et al. (2009) reported the importance of PSA clearance, identified as four PSA values obtained during the first month following surgery, was predictive of relapse risk in treated men. PSA is a useful tool for monitoring disease status following prostatectomy; however, uncertainty remains for patients and providers on what values may prompt additional treatment in the case of biochemical recurrence, defined as a PSA value of at least 0.4 ng/ml followed by a second increase in value.

Despite the potential clinical use of PSA measurement after treatment, recurrent PSA testing may cause psychological distress and lead to a decrease in health-related quality of life in men who use those values to monitor disease status post-treatment. A study by Dale, Bilir, Han, and Meltzer (2005) revealed that men experienced anxiety while undergoing initial PSA testing for prostate cancer and when it was used to determine if the disease recurred. However, no studies have explored illness uncertainty in the context of PSA monitoring following treatment for localized prostate cancer. The purpose of this exploratory pilot study was to describe the psychosocial trajectories of men newly monitored for prostate cancer following surgery.