The Watchful Waiting Management Option for Older Men With Prostate Cancer: State of the Science

Meredith Wallace, PhD, APRN, Donald Bailey, Jr., PhD, RN, Maureen O’Rourke, PhD, RN, and Michael Galbraith, PhD, RN

Key Points . . .

➤ Watchful waiting is a prostate cancer management option for older men with well-differentiated low-volume prostate cancer and a life expectancy of less than 10 years.

➤ Watchful waiting involves an active, deliberate management approach to prostate cancer and is not an opportunity for men to be overlooked by the healthcare system.

➤ Little information is available to help men understand this management option and help them deal with the uncertainty and anxiety that accompanies living with cancer.

Objectives for CE Enrollees:

1. List criteria used to determine which men with prostate cancer may be candidates for watchful waiting.

2. Compare outcomes for men who receive watchful waiting as opposed to surgery or radiation therapy.

3. Discuss interventions being studied to address the physical and psychosocial concerns of men with prostate cancer.

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atchful waiting, also known as surveillance and expectant management, has been defined as initial surveillance followed by active treatment if and when progression of the prostate tumor produces bothersome symptoms (Adolfsson, 1995). The therapeutic goal of watchful waiting is to spare patients with clinically localized disease from further morbidity and mortality without compromising survival. The rationale for watchful waiting has its basis in the empirical observation that more men were dying with prostate cancer than from prostate cancer. This is supported by research showing that incidence rates far exceed mortality rates (Jemal et al., 2003). The widespread use of prostate-specific antigen (PSA) testing also has led to the early diagnosis of disease that is more likely to be organ confined and, in some cases, clinically insignificant. Diagnosis at this early juncture often leads to aggressive treatment resulting in significant morbidity, including incontinence and impotence, that detracts from quality of life (QOL).

Recommendations for watchful waiting have not come without strong opposition. Opponents cite evidence that