



POSITION STATEMENT

Early Detection of Testicular Cancer

The Cancer Society recommends that men, especially those between the ages of 15 and 45, should get to know how their testicles normally feel, by checking them from time to time in the shower or bath. If they notice anything unusual, they should see their doctor.

Each year in New Zealand about 125 men are diagnosed with cancer of the testicles and about 5 die of the disease.¹ Testicular cancer accounts for 1% of all cancers in men. In New Zealand it is the most common type of cancer among men between the ages of 15 and 24 years, and the second leading cancer in men 25-44 years.

Despite a slow increase in incidence, there has been a dramatic improvement in the prognosis over the last twenty years.² Although prognosis depends on the cell type and stage of disease, testicular cancer can now be regarded as highly curable.³ Patients diagnosed with localised disease require less treatment and have lower morbidity.⁴ An association has been shown between advanced disease and an initial delay by the patient and/or physician.⁵ Reasons for patient delay include ignorance, fear that swelling is due to venereal disease and embarrassment.⁶

The causes of testicular cancer are uncertain. The only clear risk factor is cryptorchidism (undescended testicle). However, only about 10% of men with testicular cancer have this history.⁷ Because testicular cancer occurs mainly in young men, it is likely that factors before birth and events during early infancy and puberty are important. Men with a family history of testicular cancer may be at higher risk of this disease.⁸ Men who have had the disease in one testicle appear to be at higher risk of developing testicular cancer in the other testicle.⁹

Monthly testicular self-examination (TSE) and physician examination are recommended by some groups for the early detection of testicular cancer. There is no direct experimental evidence on which to base these recommendations, since no studies have been done to determine whether they increase the proportion of cancers diagnosed at early stages, or improve outcome.¹⁰ For this reason the Cancer Society does not recommend monthly TSE or regular examinations by a physician. The Cancer Society recommends, however, that men, especially those between the ages of 15 and 45, should get to know how their testicles normally feel, by checking them from time to time in the shower or bath. If they notice anything unusual, they should see their doctor.

References

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