

Seeds of Life for Prostate Patients

It's the most common form of cancer for men. But it's also one of the most curable. Prostate cancer is very treatable in its early stages. And today, patients have even more options for recovery, including a new technology that will soon be unveiled at Provena Covenant.

Years ago, prostate cancer patients had few options — either major surgery to remove the prostate or weeks of external radiation therapy. Today patients may be treated in just one day — with the help of some very special seeds.

Brachytherapy, which means “fast therapy,” uses radioactive seeds to treat prostate cancer. The seeds, which are the size of grains of rice, are implanted into the prostate so they can kill the cancerous cells. The seeds emit radiation over the course of several months. They become inactive afterwards, so they do not need to be surgically removed.

Provena Covenant will soon be the first hospital in the nation to use a new complete brachytherapy system known as Interplant.TM The new system allows the medical team, which includes a urologist and radiation oncologist, to perform the procedure in one step.

“This is a very exciting option for our prostate cancer patients,” says Dr. Jean-Philippe Austin, radiation oncologist at Provena Covenant. “They can now receive a treatment for prostate cancer with a high cure rate, go home the same day as the procedure and have fewer side effects.”



Less radiation, fewer side effects

In brachytherapy, small radioactive seeds are implanted directly into the prostate. Therefore, healthy tissue doesn't receive as much radiation as when external radiation therapy is used.

“With the seed implants, you can concentrate the radiation on the area that needs treatment,” says Dr. Austin. “Surrounding organs, such as the bladder and rectum, don't receive as much radiation, so patients have fewer problems with impotence, incontinence and rectal complications.”

Less time, quicker recovery

Brachytherapy is not major surgery. No incision is required — the seeds are inserted into the prostate. Therefore, recovery time is much quicker. Whereas it may take a patient a month or more to recover after major surgery, it only takes two to three days after brachytherapy.

“Studies have shown that brachytherapy is just as effective as major surgery in many cases,” says Dr. Austin. “And since brachytherapy doesn’t involve incisions, there is less chance of complications for the patient.”

Less steps, more accuracy

Treating prostate cancer usually involves several steps. The doctor has to study the prostate, develop a treatment plan, perform the procedure to implant the seeds and assess the results. With some systems these steps are all done on different days. The patient may have to come back to the hospital several times. But with Interplant™ for the first time all these steps can be performed at once.

“Everything can be done right in the operating room,” says Clif Burdette, CEO of Burdette Medical Systems, who created the technology. “The physician can perform an ultrasound on the patient, pull up three-dimensional images on a computer screen, complete the treatment plan and use the images to perform the implant. This improves accuracy greatly, since the physician can use the most current images of the prostate for both planning and performing the implant. The physician can also assess the results immediately in the operating room instead of waiting several days.”

Provena Covenant will begin using brachytherapy early this fall. Dr. Austin says patients should visit their doctors to find out if brachytherapy is an option for them. While he says that it is typically used in treating early prostate cancer, it can be used with a combination of other treatments for advanced stages. “There are several options for patients today,” says Dr. Austin. “It’s really up to both the patient and the physician to come up with a treatment plan that’s right for that particular patient.”

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

There are three main treatment options for patients with prostate cancer.

Please contact your physician to discuss the treatment that’s best for you.

- **Radical Prostatectomy** — Major surgery to remove the entire prostate
 Procedure Time: 3 hours
 Recovery Time: about 1 month
 Success Rate: 77% – 95%
- **External Radiation Therapy** — Radiation to outside of the body, used to kill cancerous cells in the prostate and immediate surrounding area
 Procedure Time: 5 minutes a day for 5–6 weeks
 Recovery Time: varies
 Success Rate: 50%
- **Brachytherapy** — Process of implanting small radioactive seeds into the prostate to kill the cancerous cells
 Procedure Time: 1 hour
 Recovery Time: 2 days
 Success Rate: 79% – 97%

(Source - Wessels, Arnold, & Henderson, November 1997)

Christie Clinic will hold free prostate screenings for the public at Provena Covenant’s Procedure Center in September. The screenings will be held on Wednesday, September 23, 1–4 p.m., and Saturday, September 26, 8–11 a.m. For more information please call Christie Clinic Department of Urology at (217) 366-1240.