



The Oncology Report, Fall 2007

The comprehensive reports from the 43rd annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology

# The Oncology Report

# Maintaining Quality of Life Is Prostate Cancer Patients' Top Concern

The major worry of men with prostate cancer is their ability to maintain a good quality of life.

The finding, from a Web-based survey of 2,128 men with prostate cancer, was "surprising, but not shocking" lead researcher, Dr. Richard J. Gralla, president of the New York Lung Cancer Alliance in New York City, said in an interview based on the findings of his poster presentation.

Sex also was a major concern of the men, he noted, much more than pain but less than not being able to sleep.

Dr. Gralla and colleagues collaborated with NexCura, ([www.nexcure.com](http://www.nexcure.com)), a patient information resource on the Internet, which mandates that people register to use the site.

"This is a reliable source of health information that is written by oncology nurses in language that is readily understandable by nonprofessionals," according to Dr. Gralla.

The investigators invited men with prostate cancer to rank 18 issues on a 5-point scale with regard to their importance. The survey was conducted anonymously over a 3-day period.

Following good quality of life, the next four most important concerns were maintaining independence, ability to sleep, sexual functioning, and incontinence.

"Sleep was ranked very highly by the patients, and I think that was important to hear. It was a surprise to me to see how important this was," Dr. Gralla said.

Another surprise was the importance of maintaining independence.

"We thought this might be because our survey respondents were all men, and it might be a gender-specific thing to fear becoming dependent, but we have since done the same thing for patients with lung cancer, where half the respondents are women, and have seen

the same result." Finally, hot flashes, thought by many clinicians to be important to those men who have them, ranked near the bottom of respondents' concerns. So did pain and poor appetite.

"For families, eating, weight loss, appetite, are all very important, but the patients do not rank these so highly," Dr. Gralla said.

The information gleaned by this survey is important, as is the method by which it was obtained, he added. The most valid information about these issues should come from patients, he said, but all too often, the instruments measuring them are based more on the opinions of health care professionals.

"Using this Web-based program, we were able to get opinions from over 2,000 patients with prostate cancer, which is far and away the largest effort for content validity. I don't know how we would have found 2000 patients

with prostate cancer to give their opinions otherwise," he said, suggesting the anonymous nature of the survey allowed the men to express their fears and concerns freely. ■

*Gralla R.J. et al. Determining issues of importance for patients with prostate cancer: Results of a web-based study in 2,128 patients with prostate cancer for the development of a quality of life (QL) instrument, the prostate cancer symptom scale (PCSS). Abstract 5138.*

## Commentary

The abstract by Gralla et al. illustrates that it is important to ask patients what is important to them as opposed to assuming what physicians think might be important.

— Charles L. Loprinzi, M.D.