

# HORMONAL DRUG MAY INHIBIT PROSTATE CANCER

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. – A new study gives encouraging signs that a hormonal drug used to fight breast cancer might help prevent abnormal prostate growths from turning into cancers.

Men who took low doses of the drug for a year cut their chances of developing prostate cancer roughly in half, doctors reported yesterday at a meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

The findings need to be tested in larger studies, specialists said. But this is the first time any drug has been shown to prevent a precancerous condition from forming a tumor.

The drug is toremifene, sold as Acapodene for treating advanced breast cancer. It selectively blocks some of the effects of estrogen, a hormone men have but in much smaller quantities than women.

For decades, prostate cancer prevention and treatment has focused on blocking the male hormone testosterone. Targeting estrogen “opens up a new area,” said the cancer society’s medical director, Dr. Harmon Eyre.

Prostate cancer is the most common major cancer in the nation. More than 230,000 new cases and about 30,000 deaths from it are expected this year.

Men who have abnormal growths called prostatic intraepithelial neoplasia, or PIN, have about a 30 percent chance of developing prostate cancer within a year and about a 65 percent chance within two years.

“This is a significantly worse prognosis than, say, patients with just an elevated PSA,” a blood protein used to measure prostate cancer risk, said Dr. David Price, a Shreveport, La., urologist who led the study.

It involved 514 men with the growths at 64 sites across the country who were given either fake pills or 20, 40, or 60 milligrams of toremifene for a year. Biopsies were done at six months and a year after treatment started.

Cancer rates were similar among the groups at six months, possibly because initial biopsies had missed some cases that were found the second time around.

But after a year, 24.4 percent of those on the drug had developed cancer versus 31 percent of those on fake pills.

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