

Disturbing Increase in Prostate Cancer Incidence in Young Men

Richard Béliveau

Translated from Le Journal de Montréal, December 30th, 2019

Prostate cancer is continually increasing in young adults and these cancers are both very aggressive and are associated with a lower rate of survival, according to a recent summary.

Most men in western societies are at high risk of developing prostate cancer over the course of their lives. Autopsy studies performed on people who have died from causes other than cancer have shown that one third of men in their forties already possess microscopic tumors within the prostate¹. For one man in six, these microtumors will succeed in reaching a mature, clinically detectable state, making this cancer the most frequently diagnosed and the second greatest cause of male cancer deaths in North America.

EARLY CANCERS

In the large majority of cases (80%), prostate cancers are diagnosed in men aged 65 years and over, which shows that the progression of these prostate microtumors into mature cancers is very slow and that several decades are necessary for the cancer to reach its apogee. However, this long period of latency has been brought into question by recent results which show that more and more young men are developing prostate cancer: for example, one study has shown that the proportion of men who were aged 35-55 at the time of diagnosis went from 2.3% between 1988 and 1991 to 9% between 2000 and 2003, which is an increase of at least 300% over 20 years². The median age at the moment of diagnosis has also dropped between 1988 and 2003, going from 72 to 68 years.

These observations were confirmed by an analysis of the incidence of prostate cancer affecting adolescents and young adults³. Worldwide, researchers have observed that, in men aged 15 to 40, the incidence of this cancer have increased by 2% per year since 1990, even affecting (in certain rare cases) adolescents at age 17. This trend is disturbing because it has been known for some time that prostate cancers which affect men aged less than 65 years are much more aggressive and are associated with a poor prognosis. This has also been observed in another study: in the United States, men in the age bracket of 15-40 years were 6 times more likely to show metastases at the time of diagnosis than were older men, and they had worse survival rates after 5 years. While men aged 40-80 had survival rates reaching 95-100%, it was only 30% in men aged 15-24 and 50% in men aged 20-29.

To sum up, not only is prostate cancer hitting earlier and earlier, but these early cancers are associated with a higher rate of mortality than are cancers diagnosed at an older age.



SOMETHING IS WRONG ...

An increase this sudden in the incidence of a cancer necessarily implies the participation of certain modern lifestyle factors. According to the authors, two contributing factors are obesity, a contributor to the development of many cancers and which is known to be associated with an increase in the risk of aggressive prostate cancer, as well as sedentariness, which is increasing rapidly amongst the young. The contribution of industrial products such as endocrine perturbants, including bisphenol A, has also been suggested since the carcinogenic action of these molecules has been demonstrated on prostate cells. One thing is certain, the appearance at a young age of a cancer which normally only affects people much older is an alarm signal that our present lifestyle can accelerate, to an extraordinary degree, the appearance and development of certain cancers such as those of the prostate.

- (1) Sakr WA et al. The frequency of carcinoma and intraepithelial neoplasia of the prostate in young male patients. *J. Urol.* 1993; 150: 379-385.
- (2) Lin DW et al. Treatment and survival outcomes in young men diagnosed with prostate cancer: a Population-based cohort study. *Cancer* 2009; 115: 2863-2871.
- (3) Bleyer A et al. Prostate cancer in young men: An emerging young adult and older adolescent challenge. *Cancer* 2019; 126(1): 46-57