



Bladder cancer study determines optimal treatment to maximize life expectancy, quality of life

(Toronto – September 24, 2007) – Cancer specialists and researchers at Princess Margaret Hospital, University Health Network (UHN), are tackling an ongoing controversy about the best way to treat an aggressive form of bladder cancer – immediate radical surgery or a more conservative initial approach using immunotherapy?

To answer that question, Drs. Girish Kulkarni, Shabbir Alibhai and colleagues calculated the life expectancy and the quality of life expected from the two treatment methods. The team used a decision-analysis tool – the Markov model – a first for this form of bladder cancer.

The results will be published Sept. 25 in *PloS Medicine*, the journal of the Public Library of Science, which is a peer-reviewed, open-access journal that publishes original research relevant to improving human health.

Cystectomy – the surgical removal of the bladder – is considered an excellent treatment to cure this form of bladder cancer. In some cases, a new bladder is fashioned from part of the bowel. In others, an opening is created to collect urine in a pouch outside the body. Immunotherapy uses bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG; the tuberculosis bacterium) to treat cancer cells directly in the bladder and avoids the need for a major operation. BCG stimulates an immune response that diminishes the risk of tumour recurrence and/or progression. The researchers compared the pros and cons of each treatment in their model.

The findings demonstrate that patients under the age of 60 who opt for immediate surgery can live longer with a higher quality of life than if they had chosen the more conservative option. On the other hand, the better choice for patients over age 70 with other health issues – or for those who place a high value on retaining sexual function and avoiding other side effects of surgery that may impair quality of life – was the more conservative initial approach using immunotherapy.

More importantly, the study identified the major quality of life factors that should be discussed with patients when choosing between these treatment options.

“Our findings highlight the trade-off that exists when deciding between radical surgery and a more conservative approach to treating this pre-invasive form of bladder cancer. The results of this study should help urologists to discuss the balance between quantity and quality of life, particularly with patients aged 60 to 70 years,” says PMH surgical oncologist Dr. Antonio Finelli, a co-investigator in the study.



Princess Margaret Hospital
University Health Network

NEWS RELEASE

“What may appear to be the most suitable treatment initially may not be the case when you consider other health issues and how well an individual will cope with effects of surgery that reduce their quality of life.”

The research was supported in part by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the National Cancer Institute of Canada.

Princess Margaret Hospital and its research arm, Ontario Cancer Institute, have achieved an international reputation as global leaders in the fight against cancer. Princess Margaret Hospital is a member of the University Health Network, which also includes Toronto General Hospital and Toronto Western Hospital. All three are research hospitals affiliated with the University of Toronto. For more information, go to www.uhn.ca

- 30 -

To arrange an interview, please contact:

Jane Finlayson, Senior Public Affairs Advisor, Princess Margaret Hospital, UHN

416-946-2846 email: jane.finlayson@uhn.on.ca