Cryotherapy a Viable Option for some Prostate Cancer Patients

In 2009, New Jersey and Naples resident Doug Bohman saw a change in his body—not in how he felt but in the escalating numbers on his prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test.

“A prostate biopsy revealed a small area of cancer,” Doug says. “I had a very targeted case,” Doug says. The cancer was confined to one small area. Doug discussed several options with his urologist, William Evans, M.D.

“We talked about surgery, seed implants, cryotherapy and just watching the cancer and waiting,” Doug says. “I had a friend who had gone through cryotherapy and he’s living cancer-free.” Doug opted for cryotherapy in 2011.

Cryotherapy involves using an argon gas that is placed into the prostate through probes at temperatures of -40 degrees Celsius. Freezing the cancer cells kills them. It’s a good option for patients like Doug, who have a very small area of cancer and who want to retain sexual function and urinary control. It cannot necessarily preserve those functions if a larger area has cancer present.

“We do a double freeze and thaw,” Dr. Evans says. “The procedure is monitored by ultrasound. We don’t do focal cryotherapy on every patient. In order to do it, the cancer has to be in a very limited area. There absolutely cannot be any cancer anywhere else in the prostate but in the targeted area; and it cannot be metastatic (in other parts of the body) or a high-grade malignancy.”

Because the cancer can recur, Dr. Evans and other urologists can refreeze areas of the prostate if the cancer returns or if radiation treatment fails to eliminate the cancer. Cryotherapy, like other forms of treatment for prostate cancer, is not without risk. Impotence is a possible side effect. Cryotherapy offers select patients additional options that can improve postoperative rates.

“We cannot guarantee what will happen,” Dr. Evans says. “There is risk involved in almost every facet of what we do, but for patients who are good candidates for cryotherapy, the outcomes can be very positive and those patients can resume a normal life.”

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