

# The Prostate Cancer Charity position statement

## Prostate Self-Test Kits

July 2008

### 1. Introduction

Self-test kits for a range of disorders are increasingly available over the counter and via the internet. These self-test kits are sold directly to the public and are designed for use at home. Several self-test kits for prostate disorders are now available.

The Prostate Cancer Charity does not encourage the use of these prostate self-test kits because it is too easy for men to be falsely reassured by the test and avoid making a timely visit to a GP, to the potential detriment of their health. This document explains why we take this position on these test kits.

### 2. Background

There are several prostate self-test kits on the market. Manufacturers claim that their tests detect prostate disease by testing the level of prostate specific antigen (PSA) in the blood. Many makers argue that these tests should be used for regular screening for prostate disease, such as prostate cancer.

The Charity wishes to make it clear that these tests cannot diagnose a specific prostate disease. Nor can they detect to what degree a man may have prostate disease, including prostate cancer. These tests can only give a partial indication about whether a man is likely to have prostate disease.

When diagnosing prostate disease a doctor uses a simple blood test that follows much the same process as a prostate self-test kit. However, by using this test alone a doctor would not be able to reach a diagnosis. A diagnosis of prostate disease can only be made once a history has been taken, a physical examination has been completed and, perhaps also, only after several other tests have been taken.

### 3. What are the problems with prostate self-test kits?

Because a prostate self-test kit cannot diagnose prostate disease, the Charity is concerned that its use may jeopardise the health of men. There are three reasons why this could happen:

- a. As the prostate self-test kit cannot diagnose prostate disease, our first concern is that taking the test at home may falsely reassure men that they are healthy.

Men commonly experience 'waterworks' or urinary problems as they get older. These symptoms can be caused by prostate disease. Men experiencing these symptoms

may, therefore, think that they have prostate problems and use a prostate self-test kit. However, these symptoms can also result from other health conditions that are entirely unrelated to prostate problems.

If a man uses a prostate self-test kit and it returns a negative result, he may be falsely reassured that there is no problem of any kind and not pursue medical advice about his symptoms. This could delay medical help for a non-prostate related disease and therefore jeopardise a man's health.

- b. Our second concern is that if the self-test result comes back 'positive' some men may think they have a confirmed prostate problem but believe that there is nothing to be done. This is not the case.

A visit to the GP can still help relieve the common prostate symptoms associated with older age. Furthermore, urinary symptoms are sometimes caused by prostate cancer, so any delay seeking medical attention should be avoided.

- c. Men without symptoms but with a generalised concern about prostate issues may think that using one of these tests will identify any potential problems with their prostate. However, the test will not give a complete picture and may falsely reassure a man or cause unnecessary anxiety.

If a man visits his GP with a generalised concern about prostate issues the doctor will discuss these concerns with him and may do a blood test – the PSA test. The doctor may also want to do a physical examination and take a history so he or she can make a proper diagnosis or give advice. A test alone does not replace this level of investigation. Through this more detailed investigation a doctor is better able than any prostate self-test kit to confirm whether or not a man is healthy.

We do not have a view on the accuracy, or otherwise, of the technology of individual prostate self-test kits.

#### **4. Our position on prostate self-test kits**

The Prostate Cancer Charity's position, which relates solely to prostate self-test kits, is as follows:

We do not encourage men to use prostate self-test kits. They give an illusion of safety and proactive engagement in health. The safest way for a man with urinary symptoms to engage with his health is to consult his doctor. Men without symptoms who are concerned about prostate cancer should talk through their concerns with their doctor or with the nurses on the free and confidential Helpline at The Prostate Cancer Charity 0800 074 8383.

Men who are concerned about any symptoms that they feel are prostate-related should visit their doctor. Doctors will discuss their concerns and examine them to see what, if anything, may be wrong. At this point, a man and his Doctor may decide that it is appropriate for the man to have a PSA test to help indicate whether he has a prostate problem or not. Having made this decision in consultation with his GP, a man will benefit from the added advantage of a full consultation and examination, if required, that will enable the doctor to consider the overall

health of a man, as opposed to the limited, 'prostate-only' focus of PSA self-test kits.

#### **5. Further Information:**

- For further information about prostate problems please visit <http://www.prostate-cancer.org.uk/info/prostate/wrong.asp> or call the Charity's free and confidential Helpline on 0800 074 8383
- For more information about how prostate cancer is diagnosed please see the Charity's Diagnosis Tool Kit fact sheet by visiting [http://www.prostate-cancer.org.uk/info/prostate\\_cancer/cancer\\_diagnosis.asp](http://www.prostate-cancer.org.uk/info/prostate_cancer/cancer_diagnosis.asp) or call the Charity's free and confidential Helpline on 0800 074 8383
- For more information on the PSA test please see the Charity's The PSA Test Tool Kit fact sheet by visiting [http://www.prostate-cancer.org.uk/info/prostate\\_cancer/tests\\_psa.asp](http://www.prostate-cancer.org.uk/info/prostate_cancer/tests_psa.asp) or call the Charity's free and confidential Helpline on 0800 074 8383

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