

Simple test and more education will save lives

IF YOU try talking to young men about prostate cancer in Australia, it can cause embarrassment.

The first thing many men think of is a digital rectal exam, which has long been replaced by a simple PSA blood test for primary risk assessment.

Few men (or women) know what the prostate does, even fewer know the PSA test guidelines and, if you know what PSA stands for, you probably qualify for a PhD.

And, while experts often say men must do more to minimise their risks of the disease, the fact is our country has massively underinvested in prostate cancer awareness and education. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in Australia. More than 24,000 men are diagnosed each year.

Every day, 10 of those men diagnosed will die. And yet we have no publicly funded campaign to promote earlier detection of the disease or awareness of its risk factors.

And how many men's lives might be saved if we invest in education to lift the rate of stage 1 diagnosis above an abysmal 36 per cent?

The good news is, thanks to the support of Health Minister Mark Butler, PCFA is about to take the first step to stop avoidable deaths. It begins with an overhaul of the guidelines for prostate cancer testing.

These days more than 70 per cent of men with low-risk non-aggressive cancers opt for safe and effective surveillance strategies. And if their prostate cancers change and grow, we take action to treat them, with

the aim to immediately stop their cancers from spreading any further.

We still have a long way to go in overcoming the misperceptions that it's an old man's disease, that men die with it not from it and that it's less lethal than other forms of cancer.

The truth is more than 3500 men aged 59 or younger are diagnosed with prostate cancer every year and one of those men will die every five days. Saving their lives is up to us. And it starts with a simple blood test.

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