Prostate Cancer Gene 3 (PCA3)

the first highly specific genetic test* improves the diagnosis of prostate cancer

* CE marked
Introduction

Prostate cancer (PCa) is the most commonly diagnosed malignancy and the second leading cause of cancer death in (American) men. One in 6 men will be diagnosed with PCa at some point in his life, but only one in 50 will die from PCa. In other words, the prevalence of PCa is very high, but the aggressiveness of the malignancy varies so much that more men will die with PCa than because of PCa.

In the diagnosis of PCa the challenge is to detect clinically significant PCa that still can be cured. In most patients with PCa, symptoms do not develop when the tumour is still localised. Currently the early detection of PCa relies primarily on the serum prostate specific antigen (PSA) concentration and digital rectal examination (DRE). The outcome of both tests can result in a prostate biopsy to confirm the diagnosis of PCa.

The dilemmas when using DRE, PSA and prostate biopsy in the diagnosis of prostate cancer

DRE dilemma

DRE is a standard tool in the diagnosis of PCa. Nevertheless, the exam by itself has a very low positive predictive value (PPV) in identifying PCa. In a study in 986 men undergoing biopsy for an abnormal/suspicious DRE with low PSA levels (< 4.0 ng/mL), only 8.8% of the patients had PCa [1]. Other studies have reported PPVs of 10-19% in this patient population [1]. The DRE reproducibility is poor and inter-examiner variability high [1].

PSA dilemma

PSA is a protein produced by the prostate and is not PCa-specific. Serum PSA levels increase as the prostate gland enlarges due to benign prostatic diseases such as lower urinary tract symptoms suggestive of benign prostatic hyperplasia (LUTS/BPH) and prostatitis. The European Randomized Study of Screening for Prostate Cancer (ERSPC) [2] and the Prostate Cancer Prevention Trial (PCPT) [3] have shown that no certain serum PSA level can accurately separate malignant from benign cases.

Therefore, the PPV of serum PSA, even at a level of up to 10 ng/mL, is low (20-30%) [4,5].

Prostate biopsy dilemma

Transrectal ultrasound (TRUS)-guided biopsy provides the definitive diagnosis of PCa. However, because of the lack of specificity of DRE and serum PSA, an increasing number of men will undergo an unnecessary initial biopsy (around 65% for serum PSA levels between 4.0 ng/mL and 10 ng/mL) [5]. This number will continue to grow due to increased screening and use of lower serum PSA thresholds. In a recent survey among 139 urologists in Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK almost two thirds of respondents indicated at least 41% of initial biopsies were negative. Whereas for one in five of the respondents this percentage was even greater with at least 61% of negative biopsy results.

Since only a small fraction (around 1%) of total prostate tissue is obtained during biopsy, a negative result does not imply that the patient does not have PCa. Approximately 10-25% of men with PCa remain undiagnosed after a single sextant biopsy [5] and in one study 11% of men with a negative biopsy developed PCa within 7 years [6]. Therefore, an initial negative biopsy will frequently trigger repeat biopsies to confirm that PCa is not present.

The high percentage of initial negative and repeat biopsies will continue to increase health care costs while diminishing patients’ quality of life. Biopsies induce anxiety because of the fear of having PCa and they cause discomfort and pain. The patient can also have complications after the procedure. The incidence of discomfort, pain and complications (haematuria, haematospermia and rectal bleeding) are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Percent of patients reporting complications following a 6-12 core prostate biopsy (range reported in prospective studies involving at least 100 patients) [5-13]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPLICATION</th>
<th>% OF PATIENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort</td>
<td>34-70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain</td>
<td>50-70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haematuria</td>
<td>10-74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haematospermia</td>
<td>10-78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rectal bleeding</td>
<td>1-40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Complications requiring hospitalisation (such as severe haematuria or septicaemia) occur in approximately 1% of patients, despite antibiotics being administered prophylactically. One study showed that 1 in 10 patients would refuse repeat prostate biopsy or would require sedation / analgesia [6] which indicates that biopsies are indeed painful and bothersome for patients.

Taking all these factors into consideration, there is obviously a need for an additional diagnostic test that has an improved specificity for PCa and can better identify patients who will have a positive biopsy. This will reduce the number of initial and repeat biopsies.

Current dilemmas in the diagnosis of PCa

» An increased serum PSA concentration and an abnormal / suspicious DRE are both triggers to perform a prostate biopsy
» The PPV of both DRE (< 20%) and serum PSA (< 30% at levels below 10 ng/mL) is far from optimal
» Approximately two thirds of the initial biopsies are negative
» Since only approximately 1% of tissue is obtained during a biopsy, the fear that PCa may have been missed, when the initial biopsy is negative, can lead to repeat biopsies
» Prostate biopsy is not only costly but also causes distress, pain and discomfort for the patient and can lead to (sometimes severe) complications
» There is need for an additional diagnostic test to better predict biopsy outcome and reduce unnecessary biopsies

PCA3 and its role in improving the diagnosis of prostate cancer

Introduction to PCA3

The PCA3 Assay (Prostate Cancer Gene 3; in the past referred to as PCA3DD3 or DD3PCA3) is the first genetic diagnostic test to help solve the mentioned clinical dilemmas associated with the diagnosis of PCa. In contrast to serum PSA, PCA3 is not only prostate-specific but also PCa-specific (Figure 1) [14]. Messenger RNA (mRNA) of the PCA3 gene is highly over-expressed (median 66-fold) in > 95% of PCa tissue compared to normal or benign prostate tissue of the same patients [14,15].

Figure 1: PCA3 (DD3) mRNA is over-expressed in prostatic tumour (T and M) compared to benign (B) or normal (N) tissue, in contrast to PSA mRNA [14]
PCA3 Score distinguishes normal men and men with LUTS/BPH from men with PCa.

The PCA3 Score also discriminates normal men (aged < 45 years with no known PCa risk factors) from men with LUTS/BPH, untreated PCa and PCa treated with radical prostatectomy. There was no overlap in the 95% confidence intervals (CIs) between the groups (P < 0.01) (Figure 4) [18].

![PCA3 Score vs. prostate status](image)

**Figure 4:** The PCA3 Score seems to be able to discriminate between normal / benign vs. malignant prostate tissue [18]

PCA3 Score in men scheduled for initial or repeat prostate biopsy

The PCA3 Score was also determined in 529 men who were scheduled for (initial or repeat) biopsy or prostatectomy [19]. In total 180 men (34%) had a positive biopsy. Also in these men it was shown that the higher the mean PCA3 Score, the higher the percentage of patients with a positive biopsy (Figure 5).

![PCA3 Score vs. biopsy percentage](image)

**Figure 5:** The higher the PCA3 Score, the higher the percentage of men with a positive biopsy [19]

PCA3 Score is independent of prostate volume

In the same population of men scheduled for (initial or repeat) biopsy or prostatectomy, the mean serum PSA concentration increased with larger prostate volumes whereas the mean PCA3 Score was not influenced by prostate volume (Figure 6) [20].

![PCA3 Score vs. prostate volume](image)

**Figure 6:** Serum PSA (mean ± 95% CI) clearly increases with prostate volume; the PCA3 Score (mean ± 95% CI) is independent of prostate volume [20]
The PCA3 Assay: 
a highly specific genetic test to improve the diagnosis of prostate cancer

» The PCA3 Assay is a genetic test which is highly PCa-specific
» The PCA3 Assay uses urine to measure the PCA3 and PSA mRNA concentration and calculate the PCA3 Score
» The PCA3 Score is not influenced by prostate volume
» The probability of a positive biopsy increases with higher PCA3 Scores
» A PCA3 Score of ≥ 35 in men with a PSA ≥ 2.5 ng/mL and at least one negative biopsy may indicate that repeat biopsy is advisable;
   for those with a PCA3 Score < 35, biopsy might be delayed based on active surveillance / follow-up of the patient
» The PCA3 Score may also be used to determine the need for an initial biopsy in men with an elevated serum PSA (≥ 2 ng/mL) or with a low serum PSA but suspicious DRE; current research in these patient populations is addressing this question
» The PCA3 Assay can identify patients who have a high probability of having PCa
» The PCA3 Assay is a useful test for improving the diagnosis of PCa and reducing the number of unnecessary biopsies

Reference List