

Spotlight

By Anne Forde

Prostate Cancer Incidence Decreased by Screening

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The overall benefits of prostate cancer screening programs remain controversial. Preliminary findings of a large European trial – ERSPC - has shown a decrease in prostate cancer mortality of 20%, whereas a US-based trial showed no difference.

In this report, the authors analyzed the incidence rates in a large population-based prostate cancer trial in Finland, which forms part of ERSPC. This prospective randomized screening trial comprised three rounds of screening and was conducted over 12 years with over 80,000 men enrolled. Men in the screening arm of the study were invited for prostate-specific antigen (PSA) screening every 4 years and those in the control arm received no intervention.

The total cumulative incidence of prostate cancer was 8.3% in the screened group and 5.8 % in the control group ($p < 0.001$). Interestingly, the cumulative incidence of localized cancer was 5.3% in the screened versus 3% in control groups. Importantly, this phenomenon was reversed for advanced prostate cancer where the cumulative incidence was found to be 1% in the screened group and 1.4% in the control group.

The protocol used in the study used a relatively higher PSA cut off of 4ng/ml. The authors concede that their study overdiagnosed a proportion of low-grade cancers, which is not without consequence. However, a drop in the cumulative incidence of advanced prostate cancer of one third in the screened group is the hallmark of a successful screening program.