

# Taking the Uncertainty Out of Living with Prostate Cancer

BY JOHN POWERS

**This program will help determine if older men with prostate cancer can achieve higher quality-of-life levels by living with the disease instead of undergoing treatment.**



YSN Associate Professor Meredith Wallace discusses “active surveillance” as an option for prostate cancer treatment with a patient.

**According** to the American Cancer Society (ACS), prostate cancer is the second most common form of the disease (skin cancer is first) in American men. The ACS estimates that during 2008, about 186,320 new cases of prostate cancer will be diagnosed in the United States. About one man in six will be diagnosed with prostate cancer sometime during his lifetime.

In addition to these striking statistics, men with prostate cancer face less than desirable traditional treatment options—radical prostatectomy and/or radiation. These treatments are often accompanied by significant side effects including incontinence and erectile dysfunction.

With a \$30,000 grant from Yale Cancer Center through Institutional Research funds from the American Cancer Society, Meredith Wallace '93, PhD, APRN-BC, Associate Professor at Yale University School of Nursing, is beginning a research study called “Uncertainty Management Intervention.” This program will help determine if older men with prostate cancer can improve their quality of life by living with the disease instead of undergoing treatment.

“There is a growing body of evidence that specific forms of prostate cancer are overtreated,” Wallace commented. “It is known that many older men, especially those with other chronic medical illnesses, are more likely to die with prostate cancer

than because of it.”

In this study, an intervention will be developed to allow older men with certain kinds of tumors to live with the uncertainty of prostate cancer. Instead of the radical treatment, men will undergo “active surveillance,” and receive information on this process through an internet-based program.

Active surveillance or “watchful waiting” involves an intensive monitoring approach to the management of prostate cancer whereby a decision is made to regularly evaluate the disease status and initiate treatment only if disease progression is detected. While active surveillance appears to be a cost-effective and logical approach to avoid high costs and the side effects of treatment, it has been shown that living with cancer results in “intolerable uncertainty.” Wallace’s study will develop a process to help men rethink prostate cancer as a chronic illness rather than an instant killer.

“Despite this information and the growing body of research supporting active surveillance, it is difficult for a person to live with cancer. Nurses play an instrumental role in helping older men to understand and live with prostate cancer as a chronic illness,” added Wallace. “These men may be able to avoid expensive treatments with documented side effects and still live high-quality lives.”