Testicular cancer

Testicular cancer, although a relatively rare cancer, is the most common cause of malignancy in young men aged 15-40 years (Chia et al 2010). Approximately 2,300 men are diagnosed with testicular cancer each year in the UK (NHS 2019).

The type of testicular cancer is classified according to the cells within which the cancer originated. 95% of testicular cancers are germ cell, within which sperm is produced. Less common types of testicular cancer include Leydig and Sertoli cell tumours (NHS 2019).

Ordinarily testicular cancer is painless until in the advanced stages (Torpy et al 2008). Symptoms can include an enlargement of the testes, feelings of heaviness within the scrotum, a dull ache within the abdomen or collection of fluid in the scrotum. If a tumor metastases, symptoms can occur according to the location. Diagnosis is via a scrotum and testicular ultrasound in addition to blood test for tumour markers.

Risk factors for testicular cancer including having undescended testes (cryptorchidism); abnormal cells in the testes (carcinoma in situ); fertility problems such as low semen concentration, low motility or high proportion of abnormal sperm; previous testicular cancer; family history of testicular cancer; hypospadias at birth; inguinal hernia; HIV or Aids; ethnicity; calcium specks within the testes (testicular microlithiasis); increased height and exposure to a drug called diethylstilbestrol in the womb (Cancer Research UK 2018).

Treatment can encompass surgery to remove the affected testes (orchiectomy), radiotherapy and chemotherapy (Macmillan 2018).

The type of treatment will vary depending on the disease stage, tumour size, specific testicular cancer subtype, whether the tumour has spread, degree of elevation of blood serum markers, individual age and general health (National Organization for Rare Diseases 2019). Testicular cancer is one of the most treatable types of cancer whereby 99% will survive for one year and 98% for five years or more post diagnosis (Cancer Research 2020).

Health visitors can offer advice to men on the signs and symptoms of testicular cancer in addition to encouraging them to seek help as required in relation to this. Particularly as early detection has an impact on prognosis, meaning encouragement of regular self-examination should be endorsed (Ozturk et al 2015). They also have a role in supporting individuals to cope with diagnosis and treatment as testicular cancer can have a significant psychological effect on a man’s fertility, sexuality and body image (Akers 2018)

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