

## BOB DOLE SPEAKS OUT FOR EARLY PROSTATE CANCER DETECTION

Had it not been for the relatively new PSA prostate cancer test, the Kansas senator might very well be numbered among the 38,000 American men who die each year—often needlessly—from this dreadful disease.

by Cory SerVaas, M.D.

In 1986 we began our search for a celebrity who would do for prostate cancer what Betty Ford had done for breast cancer—have the courage to go public. Our effort began by asking Rose Kushner (a breast cancer patient) to write an article urging a nationally known figure to step forward. None did.

Now, six years later, we have found our prostate pin-up man—Senator Bob Dole, senior senator from Kansas and former presidential candidate. His celebrity qualifications can't be faulted. Moreover, he is persuasive... believable... articulate... optimistic... pragmatic... and a "people" person. He has (or had) prostate cancer. And he is willing to talk about it. He especially is eager to educate the men of America to the vital need for annual testing.

When I met Senator Dole in his office at the U.S. Capitol, he was as witty and dapper as ever. Except for the relatively new PSA prostate cancer test, he might now be numbered among the 38,000 American men who die—many needlessly and tragically—each year from prostate cancer. With early detection most prostate cancer patients could be saved.

Currently, interest is running high in the medical community for finding better ways to detect prostate cancer early in more men, before the cancer lesions spread beyond the prostate gland. The prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test can do this in many cases.

PSA, a glycoprotein, was first identified in 1971 in seminal plasma. It was named eight years later, when it was found to be specific to prostatic tissue. "PSA is now the most useful



A keen wit, a master of the understatement, a super communicator and negotiator, Bob Dole is a man in the right place at the right time to tackle a national tragedy—the high prostate cancer death rate among American men 50 and older.

tumor marker available for diagnosing and managing prostate cancer," the *Journal of the American Medical Association* recently stated. "Its discovery represents one of the most significant advancements in the field of prostate cancer research in recent times."

The PSA test measures the amount of this specific protein produced by prostate cells. An elevated level of PSA can mean the presence of a benign growth of the prostate gland, commonly known as benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH). If the PSA is rapidly increasing or has increased recently, it may indicate an aggressive form of prostate cancer. Getting a baseline test is important so that an unexpected and ominous increase can be detected. Twenty-five percent of men with a PSA of 4 to 10 will be found by further testing to have prostate cancer. But 65 percent of men will be harboring prostate cancer if their PSA is more than 10. Not all prostate cancers, of course, are the aggressive type. Many may linger and just putter along, with the cells not actively dividing.

Before sitting down with Bob Dole, I already knew that his slightly enlarged prostate had been detected by Dr. Robert C. T. Krasner, the attending physician to Congress, during a routine physical. Because the patient had complained of frequent urination at night—a hallmark symptom of prostate problems—the doctor ordered a PSA. The test showed a protein level of 4.8 nanograms per milliliter, which is considered only slightly elevated.

Subsequent tests during the next two months showed the level still rising. After performing a biopsy, doctors found cancerous tissue, and the senator's prostate was removed in late December. Two weeks later he was back at work. We shudder to think how long Bob Dole's cancer might have grown before being detected by the digital rectal exam alone.

Thankfully, here he is now, ready, able, and most willing to talk to us about his prostate experience—and to



"Every time I get up to speak to a mature audience now I say, 'Let me first make a little unsolicited commercial announcement about prostate cancer and early detection.'"

Vicki Stack (right) and the senator's chief-of-staff, Sheila Burke, work together to handle prostate cancer legislation along with the hundreds of letters and phone calls his office receives on the subject. Both are registered nurses.



The Bob and Elizabeth Dole super-partnership is legendary in Capitol circles. She dropped her cabinet post to help him run for the presidency and has recently performed miracles by quietly masterminding a much needed reorganization of the American Red Cross.



alert our readers to the dangers of taking a healthy prostate for granted.

*Post*: "Have you had calls from around the country from people who've been helped by your coming out about your prostate cancer?"

*Dole*: "I've had a lot of calls. When I went public at the hospital, I think there was some difference of opinion. Even my office staff thought maybe I ought to go out and do it quietly, but it seemed to me that you ought to tell people right up front you've got a problem, and if it's resolved, then they don't have any doubts about it. When I made this statement about prostate cancer, I had mail coming from all over the country—hundreds and hundreds of letters when I was in the hospital. And primarily from men (or their wives) who had been through this process. Some said, 'It's a piece of cake, don't worry about it. I'm out playing golf.' Or from others who have incontinence or impotence problems and who are sort of searching for help, wanting to know if I had any ideas.

"So it occurred to me (maybe you can make a plus out of a minus) to get busy and start contacting some of these people and learning more about it. So by now I must have made 300 or 400 phone calls to people across the country. I talked to them about it

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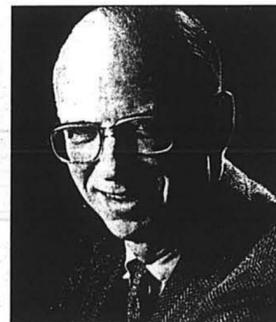
"Zero symptoms," remembers Robert Novak, syndicated columnist and co-host of the "Evans and Novak" TV interview program, relating how his prostate cancer came to light. "It was detected during a routine physical. My doctor ordered a PSA which came back elevated." Following surgery and careful follow-up exams, Novak is doing well and urges fellow colleagues to have the PSA test. "If you wait till symptoms arrive, it just may be too late."



Hall-of-Fame quarterback and television sportscaster Len Dawson, 56, recently joined the ranks of prostate cancer survivors. At his wife's insistence, he went in for a routine checkup and the cancer was discovered in its early stages. His prognosis, according to his doctors, "is full and complete recovery."



"The most important thing is early detection," says radiologist Dr. Fred Lee. Unfortunately, this was not the case for Dr. Lee himself. His cancer was caught quite by chance when he volunteered to be a guinea pig for an ultrasound equipment demonstration. His cancer had advanced beyond the prostate gland. Ever since, Dr. Lee has become the prostate patient's outspoken advocate for screening and early detection.



Like so many other men, *Washington Post* writer David Broder was totally unaware of the cancer that was growing inside him. His physician included the PSA in his annual battery of physical exams and discovered the abnormal PSA levels. Broder credits Senator Bob Dole's support and assistance as important to his recovery and is spreading the PSA message to all his friends. "I would have been blissfully unaware of the problem except for the PSA," Broder says.



What started as a routine annual physical may have been a lifesaving experience for Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, 71. Thanks to the foresight of his physician, a prostate tumor was detected through the inclusion of a blood test for the prostate-specific antigen, or PSA. The mildly elevated PSA led to a biopsy. Because the cancer was detected early and confined to the prostate, Justice Stevens is back on the bench and optimistic about the future.