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HEADLINE:New treatments battle **prostate cancer**
SUBHEAD:Dr. Hasan Murshed is a **cancer** specialist and board-certified radiation oncology consultant at the Bay Medical Regional **Cancer** Center and at Gulf Coast Medical Center. Reach him at 747-6972 or www.PanamaCityOncology.com. This information is intended for education only. For treatment, seek advice from your physician.
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TEXT:**Prostate cancer** is the most frequently diagnosed **cancer** among American males. This year, almost 200,000 Americans will be diagnosed with it, among which will be about 12,000 Floridians.

The key is to catch the **cancer** early, when it is very treatable and usually is curable. Over the past 25 years, the 5-year and 10-year survival for all stages of **prostate cancer** combined have increased to almost 99 percent and 91 percent, respectively. This dramatic improvement in survival is credited to earlier diagnosis and new and improved treatments.

Depending on the age of the patient and the stage of the **cancer**, multiple treatment options might be available. Here are the most effective, proven and latest modalities of treatment:

Surgery: This involves complete removal of the **prostate** with the option of pelvic lymph node dissection. Recently, a futuristic robotic surgery has been utilized for prostatectomy. The surgeon operates multiple robotic arms by remote control. Tiny cameras attached to the robotic arm not only can magnify the operative fields 10 to 35 times but also can create a three-dimensional stereoscopic image, giving the surgeon a feeling that he is working inside the patient. This allows the surgeon greater visualization, enhanced dexterity, precision and control. As a result, patients have shorter hospital stays, less pain, less risk of infection, less blood loss, less scarring and faster recovery.

External beam radiation therapy: This treatment uses X-rays or photons to kill **cancer** cells. Recently, a special technique called Intensity Modulated Radiation Therapy (IMRT) has become available to create a highly focused and customized treatment plan for an individual **prostate cancer** patient.

IMRT combines advanced concepts of inverse treatment planning with computer optimization and computer-controlled intensity modulation of the radiation beam to treat the **cancer**.

As a result of this precise targeting of radiation, patients receive less radiation dosage to normal tissues such as bladder and the rectum that are near the **prostate** gland. This causes fewer side effects while treating the **prostate cancer** to a higher radiation dose, providing higher cure rates. Radiation treatments are painless, last about 15 to 20 minutes and are scheduled five days a week for six to eight weeks.

Brachytherapy: This treatment involves placing small rice-pellet-size radioactive sources, commonly known as seeds, inside the cancerous **prostate** gland. Radiation emitted from these seeds kills **cancer** cells. Recently, a temporary High Dose Rate (HDR) brachytherapy technique, commonly dubbed smart bomb, has become popular. During the HDR treatment, flexible plastic catheters are placed into the **prostate**, through which a single computer-controlled high-doserate radioactive pellet is inserted for treatment.

Once a dose is optimized, a perfectly shaped, very high dose of radiation is given to the **prostate**. The radioactive source then is removed from the patient, resulting in controlling the dose to the surrounding normal tissues — bladder, urethra and rectum — thus limiting the side effects from the radiation therapy.

Though **prostate cancer** cannot be prevented, some steps can be taken to reduce the risks of developing the disease. These involve maintaining good health and avoiding being overweight, eating well, avoiding red meat and high-fat dairy products and doing regular exercise. Visit your physicians on a regular basis to check the **prostate**, and if you are over age 50 (for African Americans, over age 40), have a blood test called **prostate** specific antigen (PSA).

If you are diagnosed with **prostate cancer**, before undergoing any treatment, you should talk with several **cancer** specialists, including a radiation oncologist, to find out which treatment options are available for you.

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