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In Austria, three people die from prostate cancer every day – nuclear medicine can help turn the tide

Prostate cancer is the most common type of cancer among men in Austria. Each year it claims the lives of around 1,150 men in the country – but nuclear medicine-based diagnostics and therapy are already increasing life expectancy. Extending treatment options will be the focus of discussions at the Annual Congress of the European Association of Nuclear Medicine (EANM), which started on Saturday.

“Every year 5,000 people in Austria are diagnosed with prostate cancer. This is around a quarter of all new tumour diagnoses among males,” confirmed Prof. Marcus Hacker, President of the Austrian Society of Nuclear Medicine & Molecular Imaging. By applying nuclear medicine procedures in the diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer, specialists in this field are already playing a highly significant role in improving survival rates among cancer patients.

PET increases diagnostic clarity by around 15%

Positron emission tomography (PET) is a nuclear medicine imaging technique that involves introducing a small amount of a radioactive substance – known as a tracer – into the body and then monitoring how it spreads. This procedure has been in use in Austria since 1995, and tracers have also been used in prostate cancer diagnosis for several years now. “Thanks to PET we can distinguish between highly malignant prostate carcinoma and tumours with low malignant potential with 10-15% greater accuracy, and detect potentially malignant tumours with a 10% higher degree of sensitivity,” Hacker explained. “These new techniques enable us to conduct biopsies with a far greater level of accuracy. Furthermore, the subsequent therapy can also be tailored to individual patient requirements.”

Improved quality of life and life expectancy for metastasising prostate cancer

Nuclear medicine also offers a significant improvement in quality of life and longer life expectancy in cases of metastatic prostate cancer, in 60% of which the cancer spreads to the bones. In such cases, treatment with the nuclear medicine drug Xofigo® can lead to a significant increase in survival rates as well as a considerable reduction in bone pain for patients. If metastases are located in other areas, nuclear medicine PSMA therapies are currently applied. Under this procedure, the PSMA (**P**rostate **S**pecific **M**embrane **A**ntigen) biomarker attaches directly to the cancer cells and either halts the spread of the metastases

or reduces the number of metastases by means of internal radiation using high-energy rays. “At Vienna General Hospital we have had some early success with this innovative treatment, and we have also already managed to slow the progress of prostate cancer that is already at an advanced stage. This represents a decisive step for future recovery rates, including in patients with advanced prostate cancer,” Hacker confirmed. Another promising approach could be using PSMA biomarkers from a very early stage, in other words immediately after initial diagnosis, or in the treatment of inoperable tumours. Developments and breakthroughs like these will be the focus of the EANM Annual Congress at the Austria Center Vienna from 21-25 October.

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