

AN INTRODUCTION TO PROSTATITIS

A third, relatively common disease that classically, has been associated with the prostate gland, is prostatitis, an infectious, inflammatory disabling condition that can cause considerable pelvic pain. In comparison to the research directed to BPH and prostate cancer, prostatitis has tended to remain the poor cousin, receiving little attention. Professor Roger Kirby, a member of the IPHC, has indicated that in his extensive Harley Street practice, the management of prostatitis and BPH consumed the major proportion of his time spent on the management of prostate disorders. Although important, patients with cancer take up less than 20% of his practice activity.

The symptoms of prostatitis can influence upto 50% of all men at some period of their life [4] and prostatitis is the most common urological diagnosis in men younger than 50 years of age [5]. Surprisingly, the American National Center for Health Statistics reported [6] that in certain years, there were more physician visits by patients suffering from prostatitis, than for BPH, or cancer of the prostate.

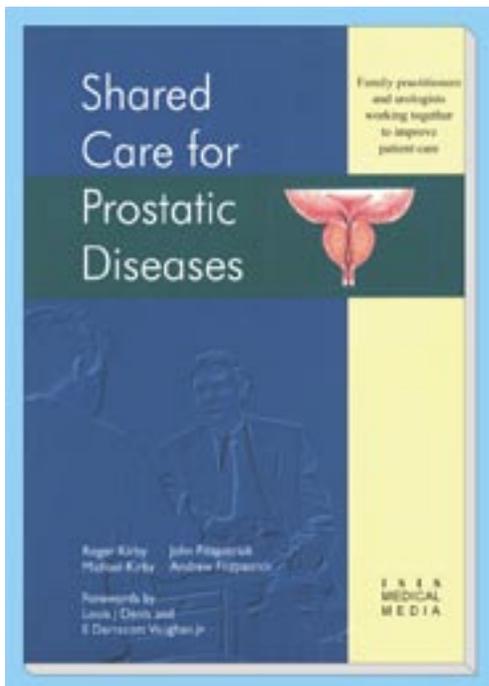


Figure 2: Kirby R., Fitzpatrick J., Kirby M. & Fitzpatrick A. (1994) Shared care for prostatic diseases. Isis Medical Media, Oxford, UK.

The advent of a new member, Professor Bernard Lobel, from the University of Rennes, has now invoked a new drive within the IPHC to understand better, the biology, aetiology and management of the various forms of prostatitis. The content of this booklet is based on IPHC discussions with other international experts, at the ancient French port of Saint Malo, on the northern coast of Brittany, at which prostatitis and chronic pelvic pain syndrome were the topics of interest. It is hoped that this booklet, the product of the endeavours of the Saint Malo forum, may not only kindle a renewed interest in prostatitis within the urological community, but also provide a better appreciation and understanding of the

disease amongst general practitioners. An enhanced awareness of prostatitis can do little but good, possibly invoking a realisation that modern molecular biology has created fresh insights into the biology of this relatively little understood disease. Renewed interest in patients presenting with prostatitis, could further promote the shared-care concept, between urologist and primary healthcare clinician (Fig.2).

Importantly, the booklet could offer patients and members of the lay-public, with some degree of assurance that although prostatitis is a disabling, uncomfortable, often painful condition, it is considered to be a benign disease and not life threatening. From a teaching perspective, aspects of this booklet provides basic pragmatic information that could help a lay-man's perception of the complexities of the prostate gland, the impact of prostatitis on the patient and also highlight the clear need for more clinical research to enhance our understanding of the underlying biology of this ubiquitous condition.

THE PROSTATE GLAND: WHERE IS IT AND WHAT DOES IT DO ?

From the medical point of view, the prostate gland falls within the preserve of the urologist, who is concerned with diseases of the urinary tract of both men and women. The responsibilities of the urologist encompass the male reproductive tract and its various diseased states. Moreover and of equal importance, since the prostate is a functional part of a man's package of sexual and procreative bits and pieces, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the gland falls well within the lay-man's sphere of interest.....and furthermore, within the interests of his partner!

The prostate gland of the younger adult male is about the size of a large walnut, weighing approximately 20 grams. It is located just below the bladder and in front of the rectum (Fig.3). The bladder stores urine which feeds into it from the kidneys. The urethra, which is the passage, or tube through which urine flows from the bladder to a man's penis, passes directly through the centre of the human prostate gland. This

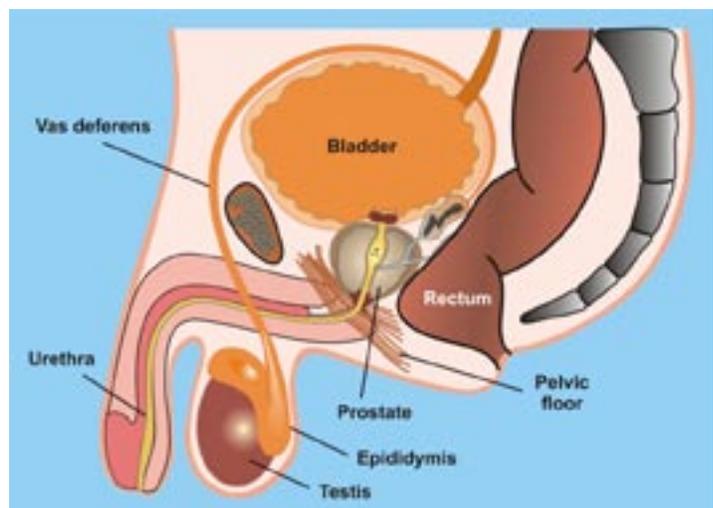


Figure 3: A simple illustration to show the location of the prostate gland relative to the bladder and rectum.