

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Price:
50 cents

[Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2005]

UCI to gauge prostate risk

Cancer researcher gets large grant to devise test to quantify it.

By **BLYTHE BERNHARD**
The Orange County Register

A cancer researcher at UC Irvine received a \$9.5 million grant from the National Cancer Institute to develop a test that could predict the aggressiveness of prostate cancer and lead to individualized treatments.

Dr. Dan Mercola, professor of pathology and laboratory medicine, will lead a team of researchers in hopes of predicting a cancer's course to prevent unnecessary treatments. "A significant number of patients who are told they have this disease do not need radical procedures like surgery or radiation," he said.



Aggressive therapies can lead to side effects including impotence and incontinence. Non-aggressive forms of the cancer can be treated more conservatively, Mercola said. "This is very good news and has great potential to be of direct assistance to millions of men and their families facing tough decisions about the appropriate treatment," said Thomas Kirk, president of Us TOO, an Illinois-based prostate-cancer education group.

Mercola hopes a test will be ready in a year for research purposes. Patients diagnosed with prostate cancer would receive a tumor biopsy or blood test in a clinical trial to determine the genetic markers of their disease, which can indicate the aggressiveness of the cancer. Mercola and his fellow researchers would then track patients and the course of their disease to see if the test correctly predicted the more aggressive forms. If the test proves successful, it could be ready for doctors' use within five years, Mercola said.

Prostate cancer is the most common form of cancer among U.S. men. About 232,000 men are diagnosed each year, and 30,350 die, the American Cancer Society says. "This new study at UCI to develop a gene signature of prostate cancer could be a huge breakthrough in prostate cancer treatment," said Jennifer Horspool, of the American Cancer Society. The American Cancer Society recommends that all men over 50 discuss prostate cancer testing with their doctors, Horspool said.

Murray Corwin, 78, was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1991 and underwent radiation therapy.

"I didn't really want to undergo the probable side effects of the surgery," said Corwin, who founded the Prostate Forum of Fullerton. A test that determined the form of his cancer might have affected his choices: "I might not have had any treatment," he said. "The psychological toll on the diagnosed patient and family (could) be lessened."

