

Survey reveals patients are unaware of gentler prostate cancer treatment

UNITED KINGDOM, July 20, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A landmark 10-year NHS study, published today and led by Imperial College London, has confirmed that [focal therapy delivers cancer control](#) as good as surgery or radiotherapy, with less than half the risk of life-changing side effects such as erectile dysfunction and incontinence.

Despite the breakthrough, new survey data from [The Focal Therapy Clinic](#) shows most men are never told about the treatment before making a decision. 93% of men had never even heard of focal therapy before their diagnosis - a damning figure considering that more than 8 in 10 men diagnosed with prostate cancer are worried about losing their sexual function, a side effect which focal therapy demonstrably mitigates.

Before undergoing treatment, anxiety around sexual function was widespread and persistent:

- 84% of patients said they were worried about erectile dysfunction before treatment. With more than 64,000 men diagnosed with prostate cancer every year in the UK, this would equate to around 54,000 newly diagnosed men
- 67% said they often or regularly thought about erectile dysfunction, which equates to over 43,000 newly diagnosed men worrying about erectile dysfunction. Nearly 1 in 3 (29%) said they thought about it constantly - equivalent to 19,000 diagnosed men every year

Concerns extended well beyond erections alone, with many men noting libido and quality of sex as anxieties:

- 82% were worried about their quality of sex life with 61% frequently thinking about how treatment might affect it
- 71% worried about lower libido, with 40% thinking about it often or constantly

Mental health issues are rampant among men after prostate cancer diagnosis. More than half (55%) of patients also reported concerns about their mental health before treatment, highlighting the close link between sexual wellbeing and psychological health.

For around 15,000 men with prostate cancer, focal therapy offers a solution that reduces the chances of sexual side effects significantly: data from Imperial College London demonstrates that the risk of incontinence, erectile dysfunction and rectal problems decreases five-fold.

Knowledge gaps fuel fear at the point of diagnosis

The survey also reveals significant gaps in patient knowledge prior to diagnosis:

- 54% had little or no real knowledge of prostate cancer
- 45% did not know the disease can present without symptoms
- 1 in 5 (20%) were unaware of PSA testing
- 32% had no knowledge of treatment options before diagnosis
- A striking 93% had never heard of focal therapy before being diagnosed

Despite this, only 5% of patients said focal therapy was offered to them at diagnosis, with many instead being offered surgery (31%) or hormone and/or radiotherapy (31%). Nearly two-thirds (64%) of patients who went on to have focal therapy said they discovered it through independent online research, rather than through their initial clinical consultation.

While focal therapy is designed to target only the cancerous area of the prostate, helping to reduce the risk of side effects such as erectile dysfunction and loss of libido, the survey suggests many patients are not made aware of this option at the point of diagnosis, contributing to heightened anxiety and fear around life after treatment.

Despite this, routine NHS access is limited to just 10 centres in England. Campaigners have described the situation as a “postcode lottery” and are now calling on NICE to review the evidence so focal therapy is offered to every suitable man, regardless of where he lives.

Raj Nigam, senior co-author on Imperial College London’s paper and consultant urologist at The Focal Therapy Clinic, comments:

"This is a landmark study. Almost 3,500 patients followed over ten years is by far the largest and longest dataset we have had for focal therapy. We have always known the functional outcomes were far superior to those of radical prostatectomy or radiotherapy, but what this adds is robust, long-term cancer control data: an extremely low metastasis rate, vanishingly few deaths from prostate cancer, and low rates of recurrence requiring further radical treatment. Crucially, it also shows that carefully selected high-risk patients, who made up around a quarter of those treated in this study, can be treated safely with focal therapy. That broadens who this treatment could benefit considerably beyond the roughly 20% of patients we previously considered eligible.

"Focal therapy itself is already an approved treatment. The real barrier has been that it is not in the NICE guidelines for primary treatment, so the NHS is under no obligation to offer it. NICE’s stated reason was always the lack of ten-year data, and that is exactly what this study now provides. That does not mean the NHS will start offering focal therapy tomorrow, but it does mean NICE can no longer point to a lack of long-term evidence, and clinicians will finally be able to present it to patients as a safe, established alternative. It is hard to say exactly when a guideline change would happen, but it feels far more likely now than it did before this study.

"What the The Focal Therapy Clinic's data points to, and what consistently frustrates me in the doctors office, is how many patients tell me, 'why did I have to find you myself?' Time and again, men and their families have had to research this independently, or hear about it through word of mouth. This study will hopefully permit equity of access to patients alongside the radical treatment options."

Methodology

The survey was conducted by The Focal Therapy Clinic among 253 patients diagnosed with prostate cancer and treated using focal therapy. Responses were collected via an anonymised questionnaire exploring patient knowledge before diagnosis, concerns prior to treatment, and experiences after treatment, including sexual health and mental wellbeing. Results reflect self-reported patient experiences and are presented as aggregated data.

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