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Boston University Medical Center

January 10, 1990

Office of Media Relations

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Dear Member of the Media:

Innovations in the diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer will be the subject of a half-day symposium sponsored jointly by Boston University School of Medicine and the University Hospital's Cancer Care Program. Members of the media are invited to attend on Saturday, January 13, from 12:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. at The Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

During the conference, experts will present information on advances in the diagnosis of prostate cancer and new hormonal therapies, chemotherapies, and surgical techniques. Following the presentations, participants will discuss the controversies surrounding these innovations.

Prostate cancer is the number one cancer in men over 50 and the third leading cause of death from cancer in men. While uncommon in younger men, the incidence in that population is rising steadily each year. A slowly progressing disease, it is more aggressive when found in younger men. Although the origin of prostate cancer is unknown, experts agree that the growth of cancer cells is related to testosterone. Most therapies, therefore, are designed to reduce the amount of testosterone in the body.

Until recently, prostate cancer was diagnosed primarily through rectal examinations. Several new diagnostic techniques include transrectal ultrasound and blood tests for serum markers. Transrectal ultrasound can give the physician a detailed image of a tumor even in the earliest stages, while the blood tests are helpful in determining the extent of the disease and whether it has spread to other parts of the body.

When the cancer is localized, surgery is often the treatment chosen. Conference participants will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of radical prostatectomy (removal of the prostate) to cure prostate cancer in its early stages and the pros and cons of a new potency-sparing surgery.

Traditionally, men with metastatic prostate cancer have been given estrogen to block testosterone production. Though effective in managing tumor growth, estrogen increases the risk of cardiovascular disease in men. Researchers at the conference will discuss a variety of drugs that show a significant effect on cancer growth without the side effects of estrogen.

Standard chemotherapy has not been successful in the treatment of prostate cancer, but there are some promising new drugs under investigation. The conference will highlight the results of preliminary research on suramin--initially developed to treat fungal diseases and AIDS--that apparently blocks testosterone and destroys cancer cells.

If you are interested in attending the conference or would like to interview any of the experts who will be attending, please call me at 638-8491.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patti Jacobs".

Patti Jacobs,
Manager of Media Relations, The University Hospital