

Operation to treat prostate cancer in only half an hour

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A GENTLER form of prostate cancer treatment that takes only 30 minutes has been devised by British surgeons.

The technique is just as effective as surgery but is cheaper and has fewer side effects.

This means men are back on their feet and back at work sooner and are much less likely to suffer problems such as impotence and incontinence.

Most importantly, the technique, called 4D brachytherapy, is available on the NHS.

The treatment, pioneered at the Royal Surrey County Hospital in Guildford, is a more advanced version of brachytherapy, a technique which has been used successfully for more than a decade. Brachytherapy, used on men in the early stages of prostate cancer as an alternative to conventional radiotherapy or surgery, consists of radioactive 'seeds' which are implanted into the prostate gland to destroy the tumour from inside.

This targeted radiation means higher doses can be used than in traditional radiotherapy and also helps to ensure the bladder and surrounding tissues are not damaged.

It also has fewer side effects than prostate removal surgery – a major operation which can involve days in hospital and weeks off work.

Surgery also often causes incontinence and leaves up to 80 per cent of men impotent. Brachytherapy usually takes



Recovered: *Guy Eastman*

around three hours but the team have refined it to take as little as half an hour without losing any effectiveness.

Surgeons use a two-minute scan to take five key measurements of a man's prostate.

'You are out the same day'

These are fed into a computer programme which uses information from hundreds of previous operations to work out how many seeds are needed and where they should go.

Up to 120 seeds, each the size of a grain of rice, are then inserted into the prostate in an

'IT'S A GIFT FROM HEAVEN'

FEARING he would be left incontinent or impotent from a relatively young age, Guy Eastman put thoughts of prostate cancer treatment to the back of his mind for more than five years.

He was only 49 when a health check raised concerns about his prostate but did not get tested until five and a half years later.

Mr Eastman, a fund manager from central London, said: 'I thought if I have a fairly healthy sex life for 15

years and can go on with the prostate cancer without something going wrong, maybe that is better than being impotent from 50.'

The father of three had 4D brachytherapy early last year. He took Viagra-like tablets for a short while but no longer needs them and is on daily continence tablets but has few problems.

He said he is delighted with the results. He added: 'Brachytherapy was to me a gift from heaven.'

operation that takes between 30 to 40 minutes.

Patients are often discharged on the same day and return to work within 48 hours.

Some 83 per cent of men remain potent, more than both surgery and conventional brachytherapy.

Incontinence is also much rarer, with fewer than one in 100 patients suffering bladder problems afterwards and, unlike surgery, patients do not need to use a catheter.

The treatment is at least as successful at eradicating cancer as surgery and is slightly cheaper at around £5,000 per patient.

The technique's pioneer, consultant urological surgeon Pro-

fessor Stephen Langley, said surgery and 4D brachytherapy were 'chalk and cheese'.

He said: 'One option takes five hours and involves a catheter, the other takes 30 minutes and you are out the same day.'

'They are for the same disease, just different treatments.'

Professor Langley is training doctors from a number of British hospitals in the hope that the treatment will soon be in widespread use.

Meg Burgess, specialist nurse at The Prostate Cancer Charity, said: 'We look forward to seeing how this new technique compares to existing brachytherapy treatments and welcome any evidence of a benefit to men with prostate cancer.'