



Birmingham urologist says PSA screening works, despite study

By **DAVE PARKS**
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The most recent U.S. study questioning the value of PSA testing is seriously flawed, says the president of a large urology practice in Birmingham.

Dr. Mark S. DeGuenther, president of Urology Centers of Alabama, said researchers in the Prostate, Lung, Colorectal and Ovarian Cancer Screening Trial reached their conclusions too quickly. He said falling prostate cancer death rates are a strong sign that PSA screening works.

The PLCO study, published March 26 in the *New England*

Journal of Medicine, concluded that increased PSA screening failed to save lives. The study was based upon thousands of men who were followed for a median of 6.3 years. DeGuenther said that was an inadequate amount of time, given the slow growth of prostate cancer.

"Once diagnosed, if left untreated, most men will not die from the disease for 7-10 years because it is relatively slow growing," DeGuenther said. "This is the study's major and glaring flaw."

Dr. Mona N. Fouad, a co-investigator from the University of Alabama at Birmingham,

one of 10 medical centers participating in the PLCO study, said it was possible that "a small benefit" from increased PSA testing could emerge in coming years.

Therefore, follow-up will continue until all participants have spent 13 years in the trial, she said.

"Still, we don't think it's going to be much different," Fouad said.

DeGuenther also criticized news reports about the PSLO study because many downplayed another study published the same day in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

That study, the European Randomized Study of Screening for Prostate Cancer, found a 20 percent reduction in prostate cancer deaths associated with PSA testing every four years.

Participants in the European study were followed for a median of nine years. However, that study also found that increased PSA testing led to overdiagnosis — something that, medical authorities warn, can lead to unnecessary medical procedures.

DeGuenther said deaths from prostate cancer have dropped 38 percent between 1995 and 2005, following the

widespread introduction of PSA testing in the early 1990s.

"Early detection treatment is the only explanation for this dramatic decline in the death rate," he said.

Men should not be discouraged from getting PSA tests, he said. "Each man, in consultation with his physician, should consider his individual situation, weighing the risks and benefits of screening," DeGuenther said.