

Doctor gets prostate-cancer patients back to work quickly

BY CHARLOTTE LIBOV

When Charles Royce was diagnosed with prostate cancer at age 39, the Michigan man knew he should only be concerned about his health. But he couldn't help thinking about his business as well.

"I own a small, third-generation-run manufacturing company, and the only sales force is my brother, my brother-in-law and me. We all balance 10 plates in the air, so the thought of my being away from my work for weeks could have disrupted a lot of things," said Mr. Royce, whose company, Royce Rolls, manufactures hospital carts.

After doing some research, Mr. Royce came upon Arnon Krongrad, a pioneer in laparoscopic radical prostatectomy, in which the cancerous prostate is removed without major surgery.

"It went beautifully. I went from needing a recovery that could take months to only days," said Mr. Royce, who said he has been cancer-free since 2001.

Prostate cancer is the second-most common cancer among men behind skin cancer. It is estimated that by Dec. 31, nearly 235,500 men will have been diagnosed with it this year and an estimated 27,350 men



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will have died from it., making it second only to lung cancer as the leading cause of cancer death in men, according to the American Cancer Society.

Dr. Krongrad, president and founder of the Krongrad Clinic in Aventura, heads the Prostate Cancer Project, a not-for-profit foundation, and in 1999 was named a Health Care Hero by the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce. He prefers to use more vivid terms to bring home the danger posed by prostate cancer. His patients have included televangelist Pat Robertson.

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Because all men are at risk of

prostate cancer, he said, screening is important. The risk increases with age and among those having a family history of the disease. Men sometimes avoid being screened because they are concerned that if they do have prostate cancer, they will be subjected to treatments that require lengthy recuperation, said Dr. Krongrad. "Most of my patients are very busy guys in their 50s and 60s. They look at conventional surgery, which takes four to six weeks of recuperation, and they say, 'Who has time for that?'"

Laparoscopy is a minimally invasive procedure that has become popular, replacing general surgery for a variety of procedures including removal of the appendix and gallbladder, reparation of her-

nias and some cardiac and vascular work.

Carbon dioxide is pumped into the abdomen to create more space in which the surgeon can work. Then, small incisions, or portholes, are made in the abdomen. A special instrument called a laparoscope is inserted into one of the portholes so the surgeon can view the internal area on a monitor. The prostate and related lymph nodes are removed through one of the portholes, the laparoscope is removed and the portholes sutured.

As with any form of treatment, the use and success of prostate laparoscopy depends on the stage in which the disease is diagnosed. "Early diagnosis is the key to effective management," Dr. Krongrad said. "It sounds like a mantra, and it should be. No matter what kind of cancer you have, if the disease is caught early, you have a number of treatment options.

Early detection is feasible in prostate cancer because of the development of the PSA screening test, a blood test that "can be combined with a cholesterol test," Dr. Krongrad said. It measures the blood level of a protein

made by the prostate, which rises in the presence of prostate cancer along with other conditions.

"If the disease is caught early, which happens in most cases because of PSA tests and physical exams, you have a number of treatment options. If you're going the surgical route, which is extremely common and very fitting for many patients, you can diminish the pain and suffering which goes with radical surgery with LRP. It's the same treatment, but there's much less pain, much less bleeding and patients end up much more functional. Most of my patients are out of bed within a few hours, out of the hospital in a day and driving a few days later," Dr. Krongrad said.

Mr. Royce was skeptical initially, he said. But after flying to Miami and meeting Dr. Krongrad, he was sold. He underwent the procedure, flew back to Michigan and quietly went back to work.

"I didn't make a point of telling my employees about it," said Mr. Royce. But, he added, "when one of my employees was diagnosed with prostate cancer, I made sure he came down here to get the same treatment."