New Insights on Prostate Cancer

The patient-driven initiative gathers data sets and makes them publicly available to scientists in order to speed up discoveries.

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Over 1,000 men with metastatic and advanced prostate cancer have offered their insights, medical records and genetic samples (saliva, blood biopsies or tumor tissue) to a growing database at the Metastatic Prostate Cancer Project. The patient-driven initiative gathers data sets and makes them publicly available to scientists in order to speed up discoveries. Researchers at the MPC Project—a collaboration between MIT's Broad Institute and the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute—published a paper detailing the results of the project thus far, including confirmation that collecting blood biopsies can lead to valuable findings. What's more, the project helps narrow geographic gaps by including rural cancer patients in the genomic data; it also allows for greater racial and ethnic diversity (in the United States, Black men have the highest prostate cancer mortality rate).

Two related but separate studies underscore that genetic ancestry can affect tumor biology. Research led by Clayton Yates, PhD, the director of the Center for Biomedical Research at Tuskegee University, found that prostate tumors from men of African descent were more likely to have specific mutations—"an exciting discovery," Yates notes, that could lead to targeted, more effective prostate cancer treatment.

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