Advertising Campaign Puts Face on Prostate Cancer

Meet Prosty the Spokesgland. The plucky prostate recently debuted on Capitol Hill, starring in a television advertisement designed to rally support for research into effective imaging tests for prostate cancer.

“Women have the mammogram,” said Faina Shtern, M.D., president and chief executive officer of the nonprofit AdMeTech Foundation, which organized the October press event. “Men want to know, ‘Where is our man-o-gram?’”

Last year AdMeTech, which Shtern founded in 2000, decided to focus on drawing philanthropy and government funding dedicated to prostate cancer imaging research. The foundation received Department of Defense grants in 2000 and 2002, which it used to fund research into molecular tags that could highlight incipient prostate tumors.

“We want to convince Congress that funding in this area is vital,” said Shtern, the former chief of the diagnostic imaging research branch at the National Cancer Institute.

The Prosty campaign personifies the problem as Shtern and her coalition see it. After the gland gets poked by a gloved finger and pierced by biopsy needles, he spins around and points to a throbbing red pustule on his backside. “Hey, you missed a cancer!” he protests.

Shtern’s coalition also wants to reduce the number of biopsies that men undergo. “The number of unnecessary biopsies is staggering,” she said.

Bill Nelson, M.D., Ph.D., professor of oncology at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, said that molecular tagging—designing molecules that latch onto prostate cancer cells for various scanners to read—is the most promising prostate imaging technology under development. But he cautioned that an effective test is years away.

In other words, Prosty might have a job for a while. “I didn’t want this campaign to be some boring doctor talking in front of some plant in his boring office,” said Stephen Nemeth, the Hollywood producer who created Prosty. “I wanted to shake things up, get men talking about their prostates.”

Shtern said that the 30-second Prosty advertisement will begin airing next year. The video and other campaign materials are available online at http://www.manogram.org.

—Brian Vastag