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KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE DIGITAL RECTAL EXAMINATION: EXPERIENCES IN COLOMBIA

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ABSTRACT

Prostate cancer is the leading cause of malignancy in Colombian men. Early detection through the combination of prostate antigen and digital rectal examination has been important; however, men refuse digital rectal examination on account of discomfort, embarrassment and fear of detection of cancer, among others.

Therefore, this study aimed to describe and analyze the knowledge and perceptions of the Colombian male population regarding digital rectal examinations.

A descriptive study was conducted through an anonymous and virtual survey of adult men between 2023 and 2024. The survey included variables such as age, sexual orientation, number of children, history of prostate diseases, relatives with prostate cancer, and experience and perceptions of digital rectal examination.

The study included 791 men with an average age of 36.85 years. The majority (84.20%) were heterosexual. Concerning prostate medical history, 0.76% had prostate cancer, 3.79% had benign hyperplasia, and 2.53% had prostatitis. A total of 16.69% had undergone a digital rectal exam at some point. The decision not to perform the digital rectal examination was mainly due to a lack of knowledge (49.32%), fear (5.61%), or other reasons (45.07%).

Although the Colombian male population has basic knowledge about the importance of digital rectal examination in the detection of prostate cancer, negative perceptions persist regarding the performance of this screening test. The main reasons for avoiding this test include ignorance, lack of medical advice, sociocultural barriers, fear, shame and misogyny. Therefore, health promotion and disease prevention programs must be strengthened based on the reeducation of medical professionals and patients to deconstruct self-destructive masculinity.

KEYWORDS: *rectal examination, prostate cancer, man, disease, health.*

INTRODUCTION

Prostate cancer is the second most common cause of malignancy in the male population and the eighth most common cause of mortality worldwide [World Health Organization, 2024a], with emotional and psychological burdens on the affected population, generally derived from stigmas that

persist with treatment and related to hegemonic social construction of masculinity [Medina-Coello E et al., 2009; Rivero A, Berríos R, 2016]. In Colombia, prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men and the second most common cancer in the general population, slightly surpassed by breast

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