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For Immediate Release

NONINVASIVE TEST FOR BLADDER CANCER MAY SAVE LIVES
Leading-edge researchers excited about test's potential, possibilities

PLAINVIEW, NY, June 2009 — An advanced, noninvasive urine test to both diagnose and monitor bladder cancer has the potential to not just make testing for the disease easier, but to save thousands of lives, says New York genetics expert Dr. Shashi Pawar.

Encouraged by the National Institutes of Health, researchers are fine-tuning the test that would allow pathologists to examine a urine sample for specific genes and genetic activity related to bladder cancer, rather than require the patient to undergo an invasive procedure like biopsy.

"Urine tests are available now, but they're not as advanced as what we hope to have available to patients very soon," said Dr. Pawar, director of Genetics for Acupath Laboratories, Inc. Accredited by the Joint Commission and College of American Pathologists among other national organizations, Acupath is a leader in providing physicians and patients with accurate and innovative pathologic, molecular and cytogenetic analyses.

"The current urine screening tool for bladder cancer is used in conjunction with other diagnostic procedures," Pawar explained. "This new test could potentially replace other procedures, which is exciting. Like with other forms of cancer, the earlier bladder cancer is diagnosed, the better the chance for it being treated successfully."

The potential of this noninvasive test was reported at the recent annual meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research.

"It's an exciting time for me, as a professional, to be on the leading edge of this field. But more importantly, it's an exciting time for patients," Dr. Pawar added. "Science has the ability to not just enhance how we treat bladder cancer, but to enhance how bladder cancer patients live their lives."

More than 70,000 people in the United States will be diagnosed with new cases of bladder cancer in 2009, says the National Cancer Institute. It's the fourth most common type of cancer in men and the eighth most common in women, leading to roughly 14,000 deaths a year.

Experts have not yet been able to pinpoint what causes bladder cancer, but believe that both genetic and environmental factors come into play. These risk factors include:

Age. People under 40 rarely develop the disease.

Smoking. According to the American Cancer Society, smokers are more than twice as likely to suffer from bladder cancer than nonsmokers. Smoking can also be blamed for close to half of bladder cancer deaths.

Race. Whites have the highest bladder cancer rates; Asians the lowest.

Family or personal history. People with family members who've had bladder cancer are at increased risk. Recurrence is also common among those who've had the disease.

Being a man. Men are three times more likely to develop bladder cancer.

Studies have also found that people who have been infected with parasites common in the tropics, or have been treated with the drugs cyclophosphamide or arsenic, are also at increased risk. Certain industrial chemicals often used in the dye industry—aromatic amines, such as benzidine and beta-naphthylamine—have also been linked to the disease.

The artificial sweetener saccharin has been found to cause bladder cancer in animals, though there is no proof that it puts people at risk. Those with concerns should speak with their physician.

Common bladder cancer symptoms include blood in the urine; pain during urination; frequent urination; or frequently feeling the need to urinate without actually voiding.

If bladder cancer is suspected, a physician may order a combination of diagnostic exams. These may include laboratory urine tests; imaging like PET or CT scans; a procedure called cystoscopy, which requires a slender tube being snaked into the bladder; or surgical biopsy.

Health experts are hopeful, however, that the new urine test will help at least some patients avoid the more invasive diagnostic and staging techniques. The ease of the test could also help reduce healthcare costs.

“Any time you make testing easier, and less invasive, the patient benefits,” said Dr. Pawar, who at Acupath works with a team of board-certified pathologists who specialize in uropathology—the science of diagnosing illnesses within the urinary tract. Acupath has also built a reputation on offering the latest advances in uropathology and related technologies.

“What’s also great is that this new advanced testing procedure is giving bladder cancer a spotlight,” she added. “People don’t tend to talk about bladder cancer as much as other forms. But education about the disease needs to get out there.”

About Dr. Shashi Pawar:

A diplomat of the American Society of Human Genetics and member of the Association of Molecular Pathology, Dr. Shashi Pawar serves as director of Genetics for Acupath Laboratories, Inc. Her more than 20 of experience in molecular genetics and molecular pathology includes working as a consultant for the Center for Human Genetics in Cleveland; a technical director of Genova Diagnostics; and holding several diagnostic laboratory directorships. Published in dozens of selective medical journals, her educational background includes a Ph.D. in biochemistry from City University of New York. She also served a clinical molecular genetics fellowship at Yale University and a clinical cytogenetics fellowship at Columbia University.