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ASPI honors Dr. Matthew Cooperberg for social media campaign resulting in AS being restored as the 'preferred' approach for low-risk prostate cancer

Active Surveillance Patients International (ASPI) Special Award for Advocacy for 2025 went to two urologic oncologists who helped persuade a leading guideline group to reverse its downgrade of Active Surveillance (AS) as the preferred management option for men with low-risk prostate cancer.

ASPI has honored Matthew Cooperberg, MD, MPH, professor of urology at the University of California, San Francisco, for his role in reversing a policy of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network to downgrade AS as an equal to radical prostatectomy and radiation therapy to manage low-risk (Gleason 6) prostate cancer.

ASPI is also honoring Todd Morgan, MD, chief of urologic oncology at Michigan Medicine in Ann Arbor, a member of the NCCN, for his role in what has been called "Preferred Gate." (ASPI is issuing a separate press release about Dr. Morgan's role.)

"These two distinguished urologic oncologists not only have done outstanding research and have been advocates for patients on AS, but they played important roles in restoring the status of AS as the preferred approach to managing low-risk prostate cancer," said Howard Wolinsky, co-founder of ASPI and chair of the ASPI Awards committee.

What a difference a word makes

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) is a major writer of cancer care guidelines. The organization is an alliance of 33 cancer centers in the United States, most of which are designated by the National Cancer Institute as comprehensive cancer centers.

In September 2021, NCCN released its latest guidelines for prostate cancer. The NCCN prostate panel deleted one word--"preferred"--in its guidelines that resulted in the demotion of AS for men with low-risk prostate cancer. (It left in place the word "preferred" for men with very low-risk prostate cancer, which is rarely diagnosed now.)

Daniel Lin, MD, Chief of Urologic Oncology at the University of Washington, pointed out on Twitter (now X) the change in the guidelines. NCCN, the top writer of prostate cancer guidelines, does not formally announce changes in guidelines.

At the time, Lin and Cooperberg were collaborating on a project to improve AS at the community level.

Cooperberg was stunned: “Without fanfare, honestly, the update to the guideline had come out, and they had dropped the word preferred from surveillance for low-risk patients. NCCN for low-risk prostate cancer listed radiation, surgery and surveillance all as acceptable options.”

He added there was “no particular reason given for the downgrade of AS. There was no new data. There were no new concerns in the literature about surveillance. When you drill down into the text, there were comments about high-volume disease and genomics and imaging and all these things, none of which really have any evidence to say that these patients should go straight to treatment.”

He said the change was unwarranted after 25 years of research supporting AS as the preferred approach.

‘Twitterstorm’ to take on NCCN’s policy on AS

Cooperberg, who was active on Twitter, helped launch a "twitterstorm,” a rapid and widespread social media campaign, aimed at urologic oncologists. Thus was born, “Preferred Gate.”

Urologists and patient advocates from ASPI, AnCan and ZERO Prostate Cancer lobbied for NCCN to reverse its policy.

In December 2021, NCCN again listed AS as the preferred approach for low-risk prostate cancer. Without fanfare, NCCN reversed itself. Cooperberg said the guidelines “don’t carry the weight of law, but they’re an important endorsement.”

Peter Carroll, MD, an AS pioneer and winner of ASPI’s 2024 Chodak award, said of Cooperberg: “I always knew Matt Cooperberg was destined for greatness since meeting him as a new urology resident. He has taken full advantage of UCSF’s firepower, but more significantly made his own strides in our understanding of prostate cancer – how best to detect it, best assess its risk, and how to develop a nuanced and personal treatment plan.

“He is a role model and mentor to many and an articulate spokesperson on behalf of active surveillance and a whole host of topics related to prostate cancer, Matt is also a superb

example on how to use social media for good! His Twitter campaign in response to NCCN's plan to support active surveillance more narrowly was brilliant and honestly executed."

The ASPI Special Award for Advocacy was presented to Dr. Cooperberg on June 26th, 2025 at UCSF by active surveillance patient and ASPI board member, Geoff McLennan. The video of the award presentation and Dr. Cooperberg's subsequent talk on 'The Past, Present and Future of Active Surveillance' are available on aspatients.org

Previous winners of the ASPI Special Award for Advocacy

- In 2024, Drs. Freddie Hamdy and Jenny Donovan, principal investigators of the ProtecT trial and the more than 1600 patients in the study. ProtecT proved AS was as safe as a management technique as radical prostatectomy and radiation therapy.

- In 2023, MUSIC (Michigan Urological Surgery Improvement Coalition). MUSIC won for showing how the efforts of urologists in cooperation with a leading insurer, Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan, can increase the uptake of AS. The uptake of AS in patients with low-risk prostate cancer in Michigan is more than 90%, comparable to that in Sweden and the United Kingdom. The national average for AS uptake in low-risk patients in the United States is 60%.

Mark Lichty, co-founder of ASPI and its chairman, explains, "We have designed these awards not just to honor the recipients, but also to share the ASPI message of patient empowerment and the patient voice in the prostate cancer journey. The hands depict the importance of both the patient and doctor listening to one another."

About Active Surveillance Patients International (ASPI)
Active Surveillance Patients International (ASPI) is a nonprofit organization created by men with prostate cancer for men with prostate cancer. ASPI is dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for men diagnosed with low-risk prostate cancer who are considering or choosing Active Surveillance. ASPI connects patients around the world with resources, expert insights, and community support to help them make informed decisions about their care.

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