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ASPI announces 2026 awards honoring leaders in evidence-based prostate cancer care

Dr. Timothy J. Wilt, Erasmus MC researchers, and Norwegian patient-safety advocates recognized for advancing Active Surveillance and safer prostate biopsy practice.

CHICAGO, Illinois, June 17, 2026 — Active Surveillance Patients International (ASPI), a nonprofit patient education and advocacy organization, has announced its 2026 awards honoring leaders whose work has helped make prostate cancer care more evidence-based, less aggressive when appropriate, and safer for patients.

Dr. Timothy J. Wilt, MD, MPH, will receive ASPI's 2026 Chodak Award for his landmark research on surgery versus observation in localized prostate cancer. ASPI will also recognize leaders in the Urology Department at Erasmus MC in Rotterdam, Netherlands, for foundational work in Active Surveillance research, and Agnes Marie Bjørge Gulbrandsen and Professor Emeritus Truls E. Bjerklund Johansen of Oslo University Hospital for advocacy that helped accelerate Norway's shift from transrectal to transperineal prostate biopsy.

Together, the three awards reflect ASPI's commitment to honoring the people and institutions that have helped make prostate cancer care more evidence-based, more humane, and safer for patients. The honorees span the full continuum of progress: research that challenged overtreatment, scientific leadership that helped make Active Surveillance a global standard, and advocacy that pushed medicine to reduce preventable biopsy-related harm.

"This year's honorees represent the full arc of progress in prostate cancer care," said Howard Wolinsky, chair of the ASPI Awards Committee and co-founder of ASPI. "Dr. Timothy Wilt helped establish the scientific case that many men do not need immediate treatment. The Erasmus MC team built and refined the research infrastructure that made Active Surveillance a global standard. Agnes Gulbrandsen and Dr. Truls Bjerklund Johansen showed how patient advocacy and physician leadership together can push medicine to protect patients from avoidable harm."

"ASPI exists to help men make difficult decisions with confidence, clarity, and the best available evidence," said Mark Lichty, board chair and co-founder of ASPI. "These awards honor people and

institutions that have given patients exactly that: stronger science, safer care, and a greater chance to live well without unnecessary treatment or preventable complications."

Dr. Timothy J. Wilt and the Chodak Award

Wilt, a general internist and health services researcher at the Minneapolis VA Center for Care Delivery and Outcomes Research, is best known for creating PIVOT, the landmark VA-led randomized study comparing surgery with observation in men with clinically localized prostate cancer. PIVOT challenged the assumption that immediate surgery improves survival for many men with localized disease and helped strengthen the evidence base against routine immediate treatment, supporting the rise of Active Surveillance for appropriately selected men.

The Chodak Award carries special meaning for Wilt, whose connection to the award's namesake stretches back decades to his early medical training and later to the development of PIVOT, when Dr. Gerald Chodak offered support and advice.

"It means a whole lot, but it really means a lot because of what you guys from ASPI are doing," Wilt said. "After all, research is intended to improve people's lives."

Wilt, 70, who retired in April from active clinical and full-time work while continuing some research, said the Chodak Award feels like "a wonderful capstone to my career."

Wilt also emphasized that PIVOT was a team achievement, crediting VA investigators and especially the veterans who enrolled in the study.

"I owe a lot to the investigators in VA who participated — many of them were not 'big names in the field,'" he said. "VA has always had a rich history of veterans being willing to give back not only for the good of themselves, but for the good of others. Of course, I owe it mostly to the patients."

The Chodak Award is named for the late Dr. Gerald Chodak, a pioneering urologist, scientist, artist, and first medical adviser to ASPI. The award itself is a replica of a ceremonial bowl made by Chodak's teacher and donated by his widow, Robin Chodak, who serves on the ASPI Awards Committee.

"Gerry believed in evidence, independent thinking, and protecting patients from unnecessary harm," Robin Chodak said. "Dr. Wilt's work reflects those values, and I think Gerry would have been deeply pleased to see him receive this award in his name."

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Erasmus MC recognized for Active Surveillance research

ASPI's Special Award for Research and Advocacy recognizes the Urology Department at Erasmus MC, its research colleagues, and patients for foundational work that helped establish Active Surveillance as the preferred, guideline-supported management strategy for many men with low-risk prostate cancer.

Among those being honored are Monique Roobol, PhD, who leads the Urological Research Group at Erasmus MC and has been a principal investigator with PRIAS from the start; Chris Bangma, MD, now retired, a longtime PRIAS board member; and Fritz Schröder, MD, now retired, founder of PRIAS and a pioneering figure in prostate cancer screening research.

"This award from ASPI is especially meaningful because it comes from the patients themselves," Roobol said. "Ultimately, all of our research at Erasmus exists for one reason — to help men like the members of ASPI live longer, better lives with less unnecessary treatment."

Erasmus MC has played a central role in major international work in prostate cancer screening and Active Surveillance, including ERSPC, PRIAS, and GAP3. Its researchers helped define the scale of overdiagnosis, develop practical surveillance protocols, and advance more personalized monitoring strategies, including risk-based models designed to reduce unnecessary biopsies. The department's work helped turn Active Surveillance from a promising concept into a structured, evidence-based approach used worldwide.

"We know Active Surveillance is safe," Bangma said. "We now know, with the experience of over 15 years, how to manage Active Surveillance." He added that accepted programs, such as PRIAS, help patients and physicians follow structured monitoring, quality control, and shared decision-making.

Schröder's work in screening research provided a crucial scientific foundation for understanding why many men with low-risk, indolent prostate cancer should be spared immediate intervention. His work and that of his colleagues helped shift the field away from reflexive treatment and toward evidence-based surveillance.

Norwegian advocates honored for biopsy-safety work

ASPI's Thráinn Thorvaldsson Patient Advocacy Award honors an extraordinary collaboration born from personal tragedy.

In February 2018, Gulbrandsen's father, Roar, died days after a routine transrectal prostate biopsy, and Gulbrandsen went on to pursue answers and ultimately work with Bjerklund Johansen to draw public attention to the risks of biopsy-related sepsis. Their advocacy helped accelerate Norway's move toward transperineal biopsy, which avoids the rectum and sharply reduces the risk of infection.

Gulbrandsen said the award carries both public and personal meaning.

"It means more to me than words can fully express to be selected for the Thráinn Thorvaldsson Award for Advocacy," she said. "My father died following complications from the traditional biopsy procedure. Experiencing that loss has shaped my engagement, and seeing meaningful procedural change take place in Norway — and knowing that Truls has been instrumental in helping advance safer practice — makes this acknowledgment especially powerful."

Bjerklund Johansen said the recognition reflects the impact of patient-physician collaboration.

"Receiving the Thráinn Thorvaldsson Patient Advocacy Award fills us with great joy," he said. "This recognition means so much — not only for the work itself, but for what it represents: the power of a patient and a physician working together toward a common goal of saving lives."

Their work reverberated internationally. In 2021, the European Association of Urology updated its guidelines to designate transperineal biopsy as the preferred approach for prostate cancer diagnosis. The Thorvaldsson Award is named for ASPI co-founder Thráinn Thorvaldsson, a pioneering advocate for men on Active Surveillance.

About the ASPI Awards Committee

Howard Wolinsky and Mark Lichty co-chaired the ASPI Awards Committee. Other members of the 2026 committee are:

- Robin Chodak: Grief coach, author, and widow of the late Dr. Gerald Chodak.
- Professor Freddie Hamdy, CBE, MBChB: Urological surgeon, head of the Nuffield Department of Surgical Sciences at Oxford University, and lead investigator of the ProtecT study.
- Ericka Johnson, PhD: Social scientist at Linköping University and author of A Cultural Biography of the Prostate.
- Govinda Ramakrishna: Prostate cancer survivor and Founder President of the Prostate Cancer Support Society – India.

- Paul Schellhammer, MD: Advanced prostate cancer survivor and past president of the American Urological Association.

About Active Surveillance Patients International

Active Surveillance Patients International is a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating, supporting, and advocating for men with low-risk prostate cancer who are on or considering Active Surveillance, along with their families. Through free tools, webinars, community support, and patient resources — including its plain-language guide, The Pathway: Your Guide to Active Surveillance — ASPI helps patients understand their options, make informed decisions, and connect with evidence-based information. For more information, visit aspatients.org.

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