

that screening can reduce mortality in colorectal cancer with up to 30% and also attractive to health care providers when they are told that it is cost/effective.

But, it is not that simple. There are many sources of error and bias in studies performed. This varies as in breast cancer screening where doubt now has been pronounced concerning the scientific validity of the studies, which are the basis for current recommendations (P Götzsche, *The Lancet* 2000; 355: 129–34).

Today much is focused on evidence based medicine. A firm base is especially important when you are introducing a new treatment of – as in this case – will introduce a population screening.

According to my opinion we do not have scientific data enough to advice those responsible for health care (i.e. politicians) that screening should be introduced. Especially if drawbacks are not considered in a balanced view.

In the debate I will point out that:

- (1) A relative decrease in mortality of 15–30% corresponds to an absolute reduction of less than 0.1% and that the NNT is high (650–1250).
- (2) Performed studies do not inform about number of years gained due to screening.
- (3) Performed studies very seldom report, or discuss, any harm caused by screening.
- (4) Cost/effectiveness is only estimated.
- (5) In concluding I will claim that not only the scientific analysis must be validated but that ethical and economical considerations must be done, not at least taking the harm/benefit ratio into account

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Follow-up in colon cancer

R. Schiessel. *Donauspital, Department of Surgery, Vienna, Austria*

Regular follow-up programs for colorectal cancer patients are time-consuming and require a highly skilled staff. Therefore the question is often raised whether an aggressive follow-up actually helps to improve the overall results and the individual prognosis. There is no doubt that the slow growth rate of large bowel carcinomas provides a fair chance for effective surgery of a recurrent tumor. However, an intensive, varied diagnostic program, repeated at short intervals, is necessary for the detection of recurrent disease in time to permit another attempt at radical cure. In our hospital an out-patient clinic for follow-up patients was initiated. The results of aggressive follow-up were studied to assess: 1) patient compliance, 2) early diagnosis of recurrent disease, 3) incidence of curative surgery for recurrence, 4) life expectancy after radical surgery for recurrence. Results of a computer-aided follow-up program for patients with colorectal cancer were analyzed. In a 10 year period 1293 patients underwent this program, the drop-out rate was 17%. 299 recurrences in 168 patients were discovered (40% local recurrence, 29% liver metastases and 31% others). 51% of patients with local recurrence and 47% with liver metastases were symptomfree. Radical surgery could be performed in 50% of local recurrences and in 26% of liver metastases. The 3 year survival rate after radical surgery was 35% for local recurrences and 33% for liver metastases, the five-year-survival rate 23% and 15%, respectively.

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Against follow-up after curative surgery for colorectal cancer

O. Kronborg. *Department of Surgery A, Odense University Hospital, DK-5000 Odense C, Denmark*

Vast amounts of resources, human as well as economic have been utilized over many years to detect recurrence at an early stage, making it suitable for surgical removal and thereby possible prolongation of life. Five RCT's have been published since 1995, all of these being incapable of reaching a valuable conclusion.

Overall, prospective as well as retrospective data suggest a 1% survival gain by intensive follow-up.

In recent years, a prolongation of life has been demonstrated after palliative chemotherapy for recurrent colorectal cancer, when the recurrence is detected in an asymptomatic stage.

Multicenter, multinational RCT's have been suggested to assess the best follow-up, but cost calculations based on the Danish RCT show, that a small benefit from intensive follow-up (1–2% increase in long-term survival) will be at least 4 times as expensive as that obtained by initial screening of persons with average risk for colorectal cancer.

Colonoscopy should not be used for detection of recurrence, but repeated colonoscopy with polypectomy may reduce incidents as well as mortality from metachronous colorectal cancer.

References

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Decrease in prostate cancer mortality following introduction of prostate specific antigen (PSA) screening in the Federal State of Tyrol, Austria, 1993–99

G. Bartsch, Wolfgang Hominger, Helmut Klocker, Wilhelm Obcraigner, Gianluca Severi, Chris Robertson, Peter Boyle. *Innsbruck, Austria/Milan, Italy*

Introduction and Objectives: Several factors support the use of screening tests for early detection of prostate cancer. First, patients do not experience symptoms in the early stages, and are unlikely to seek medical attention until the disease has progressed. Second, improvements in detection methods have increased the prospect for identifying the disease at an early stage when the lesion is still organ-confined, more easily treated, and often curable.

Methods: In 1993 PSA testing was made freely available to males aged 45–75 years in the federal state of Tyrol, Austria, and a mass screening project was launched. The Tyrol is an Alpine region in the western part of Austria with 331,410 inhabitants (65,123 males between 45 and 75). Previously (1990–1993) both PSA and digital rectal examination had been used as screening tools but not within an organised programme. The screening project was performed in collaboration with general practitioners, medical examiners, urologists, and medical laboratories in the Tyrol Blood Bank of the Red Cross. Informed consent was obtained from all volunteers participating in the program. In case of elevated PSA levels the volunteers were advised to undergo further urological evaluation, while men with normal PSA levels were invited to have a repeat PSA test twelve months later. The mass screening program was provided free of charge by the health and social security services of the Federal State of Tyrol and the University Hospital of Innsbruck.

Results: In the first year (1993) 32.3% of the 65,123 males aged 45–75 years underwent screening; 68% of all men in this age range were tested at least once in the first five years of the study. The incidence of prostate cancer in the Tyrol reached a peak in 1994 and has declined since. Significant migration to lower stages and an increase in the number of organ-confined, potentially curable prostate cancers have been observed since the introduction of this screening program. However, the percentage of clinically insignificant lesions in the screened group did not increase. Mortality from prostate cancer among Tyrolean men aged 40–79, which had remained constant from 1970 to 1993, has now declined, whereas in other parts of Austria the mortality rates for males in this age range have changed much less. Based on the age specific prostate cancer mortality rates in Tyrol between 1986 and 1990 there were 17 fewer prostate cancer deaths in 1997 (32% decrease), 22 deaths fewer in 1998 (42% decrease) and 18 deaths fewer in 1999 (33% decrease) than were expected. This decrease in mortality is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: The present study shows that the policy of making PSA screening freely available to the Tyrolean population and participation of a high percentage of males aged 45–75 have led to an increase in the number of organ-confined, potentially curable cancers detected as well as to a reduction in prostate cancer mortality.

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Screening may not decrease prostate cancer mortality – policy making should be delayed (until evidence from randomised studies is available)

Fritz H. Schröder. *Department of Urology, Rotterdam, The Netherlands*

Screening for prostate cancer remains a controversial issue around the world. Even in the United States where screening is highly prevalent important organisations advising on the patterns of medical care have taken contrary positions. In Europe, a statement of the committee against cancer of the European Union has adopted the view given in the title of this presentation.

Fortunately, there is evidence coming from important databases in the United States and from preliminary results of studies conducted in Europe and in Canada that screening may be effective in terms of decreasing prostate cancer mortality. This evidence however is heavily debated in the epidemiological and urological community. Even if, as is also hoped