

American Cancer Society Stands by its Screening Guidelines; Women Encouraged to Continue Getting Mammograms

Statement of Otis W. Brawley, M.D., Chief Medical Officer, American Cancer Society in Response to New York Times Article on Cancer Screening

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"Today's New York Times article 'In Shift, Cancer Society Has Concerns on Screening' indicates that the American Cancer Society is changing its guidance on cancer screening to emphasize the risk of overtreatment from screening for breast, prostate, and other cancers.

"While the advantages of screening for some cancers have been overstated, there are advantages, especially in the case of breast, colon and cervical cancers. Mammography is effective - mammograms work and women should continue get them. Seven clinical trials tell us that screening with mammography and clinical breast exam do reduce risk of breast cancer death. This test is beneficial in that it saves lives, but it is not perfect. It can miss cancers that need treatment, and in some cases finds disease that does not need treatment. Understanding these limitations will help researchers develop better screening tests. The American Cancer Society stands by its recommendation that women age 40 and over should receive annual mammography, and women at high risk should talk with their doctors about when screening should begin based on their family history.

"The bottom line is that mammography has helped avert deaths from breast cancer, and we can make more progress against the disease if more women age 40 and older get an annual mammogram.

"Since 1997 the American Cancer Society has recommended that men talk to their doctor and make an informed decision about whether or not prostate cancer early detection testing is right for them. This recommendation also still stands.

"Cancer is a very complex and complicated disease. The American Cancer Society makes evidence-based cancer screening recommendations, and strives to provide clear messages about cancer screening to patients and doctors. Our guidelines are constantly under review to evaluate them as new evidence becomes available. Simple messages are not always possible, and over-simplifying them can in fact do a disservice to the very people we serve."

The American Cancer Society combines an unyielding passion with nearly a century of experience to save lives and end suffering from cancer. As a global grassroots force of more than three million volunteers, we fight for every birthday threatened by every cancer in every community. We save lives by helping people stay well by preventing cancer or detecting it early; helping people get well by being there for them during and after a cancer diagnosis; by finding cures through investment in groundbreaking discovery; and by fighting back by rallying lawmakers to pass laws to defeat cancer and by rallying communities worldwide to join the fight. As the nation's largest non-governmental investor in cancer research, contributing about \$3.4 billion, we turn what we know about cancer into what we do. As a result, more than 11 million people in America who have had cancer and countless more who have avoided it will be celebrating birthdays this year. To learn more about us or to get help, call us anytime, day or night, at 1-800-227-2345 or visit cancer.org.

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SOURCE: American Cancer Society

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