**SHOULD I BE TESTED FOR CANCER? MAYBE NOT AND HERE’S WHY**

20 November, 2008

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Berkley: University of California Press 2004

Generations of physicians and patients have been told that, when it comes to cancer, “early diagnosis is the key to cure”. This has led, in adults, to the widespread use of screening mammography, PSA testing, and colonoscopy. In children, we have evaluated the role of urine screening for neuroblastoma and the use of the routine “well child check” to screen for a variety of diseases including childhood cancer. All of these procedures would seem to be based upon common sense and careful study.

Dr. Welch, a physician at Dartmouth Medical School, offers a ringing attack on cancer screening. He points out where the “Emperor has no clothes” as regards the use of mammography and PSA screening in adults and the perils and pitfalls of urine screening for neuroblastoma in children. In addition to the financial costs of screening, he also evaluates the emotional cost and the possibility that screening leads us down diagnostic and treatment pathways which often produce harm. In childhood cancer, for example, he cites the number of children who were injured or killed by ill-advised abdominal exploration procedures for elevation of urine catecholamines. In fact, if the children had been left alone the “neuroblastomas were probably pseudo disease” which would have caused the patient no problem.

Welch does an excellent job of describing cancer statistics, the problem of false positives and false negatives, and concludes by offering some common sense advice as to how doctors might talk to patients about screening.

This slim volume would be an interesting text for an introductory course on cancer prevention or as a choice for a “book club” discussion for oncologists.

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