

Patients report doctors not telling them of overdiagnosis risk in screenings

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A survey finds that most patients are not being told about the possibility of overdiagnosis and overtreatment as a result of cancer screenings, according to report in a research letter to the *JAMA Internal Medicine* by Odette Wegwarth, Ph.D., and Gerd Gigerenzer, Ph.D., of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin, Germany.

Cancer screenings can find treatable disease at an earlier stage but they can also detect cancers that will never progress to cause symptoms. Detection of these early, slow-growing cancers can lead to unnecessary surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, the authors write in the study background.

Researchers conducted an online survey of 317 U.S. men and women ages 50 to 69 years to find out how many patients had been informed of overdiagnosis and overtreatment by their physicians and how much overdiagnosis they would tolerate when deciding whether to start or continue screening.

Of the group, 9.5 percent of the study participants (n=30) reported their physicians had told them about the possibility of overdiagnosis and overtreatment. About half (51 percent) of the participants reported that they were unprepared to start a screening that results in more than one overtreated person per one life saved from [cancer death](#). However, nearly 59 percent reported they would continue the [cancer screening](#) they receive regularly even if they learned that the test results in 10 overtreated people per one life saved from [cancer](#) death.

"The results of the present study indicate that physicians' counseling on screening does not meet [patients'](#) standards," the study concludes.

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