

Letter to the editor: Don't discourage screenings

by: Sheppard F. Miers, Jr., Tulsa
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The publication of new cancer screening guidelines is encouraging and discouraging. Commentary and debate have temporarily raised awareness of screening to reduce cancer's horrendous effect and huge financial burdens. The recommended reduction of cancer screening also coincides with the looming federal budget consequence of providing it for millions more Americans; and some suggest it portends of basic health care "rationing."

Cancer now takes more than 560,000 American lives each year, and costs the nation more than \$220 billion annually. An individual dies of cancer in the United States every minute. One in two men and one in three women will face a cancer diagnosis. The National Cancer Institute indicates earlier diagnosis could save more than one-third of the lives being lost to cancer. Cancer screening should be encouraged and allowed to the fullest extent each American chooses to use it.

Recommending reduced testing sends the wrong signal. Cancer screening is not fun. Suggesting and rationalizing delay should save some screening expenses, and of course reduce occasional inconveniences or uneasiness for individuals at risk. It could also lose many more American lives; while adding to the staggering cost of fighting cancers detected too late.

U. S. political and health policy leaders should reduce the numbers that really count. Do everything possible to find and stop cancer by constantly promoting, encouraging and supporting screenings.

Editor's note: Miers is director of the Charlene Miers Foundation for Cancer Research

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