Ethical Issues in Lung Cancer Screening

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What is bioethics?

• Bioethics involves critical reflection on moral/ethical problems faced in health care settings toward:
  – deciding *what* we should do
  – explaining *why* we should do it and
  – describing *how* we should do it

• (Dr Barb Secker)
Why cancer screening is a bioethical issue?

- Screening programs rest on a broadly moral foundation: doing more good than harm
- This holds for individuals and populations
- Dimensions of goods and harms complex
- Junger and Wilson criteria speak to some of these
Traditional Principles

- Autonomy
- Beneficence
- Non-maleficence
- Justice
Autonomy

Autonomy is a form of personal liberty of action where the individual determines his or her course of action in accordance with a plan chosen by him or herself.
Ethical basis of informed decision making

• Respect for persons
• Voluntary
• Absence of coercion
• Enabling capacity
Second report of the National Screening Committee

“‘There is a responsibility to ensure that people who accept an invitation do so on the basis of informed choice, and appreciate that in accepting an invitation or participating in a programme to reduce their risk of a disease there is a risk of an adverse outcome.’”
Elements of Informed Decision Making

• The purpose of the screening;
• The likelihood of positive/negative findings and possibility of false positive/negative results;
• The uncertainties and risks attached to the screening process;
• Any significant medical, social, or financial implications of screening for the particular condition or predisposition;
• Follow up plans, including availability of counselling and support services.
Benefits of informed choice

• Encouragement of realistic expectations of screening,
• Facilitation of open debate about screening programmes
• Reduction in the false reassurance or anxiety provided by false negative or positive results.
Pitfalls of informed choice

- Could lead to reduced screening uptake, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.
- Inequalities in health could widen as the most disadvantaged may be most likely to be deterred.
Screening Harms

- Complications of investigation of screen detected abnormalities
- Unexpected effects, such as increased morbidity and mortality from side effects of screening or subsequent management
- Overdetection—the identification of disease that would not have presented during the person’s lifetime,
- Psychosocial effects.
- Foregone opportunities
Rival Frameworks

• Need to include public health ethics considerations into informed decision making
• What is the status of population benefit
• How is reciprocity conceptualized in appeals to enhance screening behaviour?
Sufficiency of evidence

• Evidence will never be sufficient or complete
• By the time evidence accumulates to a certain level, new candidate technologies arise
• New technology rapidly unsettles established programs
Who is informing whom?

- Cancer screening decisions normatively complex
- Not simply from ministries/organizations to individuals
- Screening contextualized in priority setting debates
- Need to understand community values and have reliable means to ascertain them
- Need comprehensive information management and “honest brokerage” given current information explosion.
Paradox of Application

• Demonstrated benefits may be more apparent in aggregate
• However, perception of benefit is understood at the individual level
• 18 years of screening to prevent 1 death per 1,000 persons screened may be acceptable from a population basis, but may seem less compelling to clinicians and individuals
• Population rationality does not equate to individual rationality
Hidden Normativity

- Locus of responsibility
- In HCP initiated screening = iatrogenesis
- In other “system” based programs uncertain who bears responsibility
- How are “harms” holistically conceptualized?
- In targeted programs is there a stronger need for reciprocity and protection from harm?
The Need for Trust

• Trust is accepted vulnerability to another’s power to harm one, a power inseparable from the power to look after some aspect of one’s good.

Annette Baier