



Screening: Evidence and practice

Angela E Raffle, J. A. Muir Gray

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Screening is the routine testing of populations to identify individuals who may have a particular medical condition or disease. It is carried out by both government and private organisations with the aims of: better prognosis/outcome for individuals; to protect society from contagious disease; to allow rational allocation of resources; to allow selection of healthy individuals; and for research purposes. About £500 million is spent on screening each year in Britain alone, and it is an issue that has relevance in health systems and for the general public and media.

For many years, screening was practised without debate, but in the 1960s serious challenges were raised about standard screening procedures. Benefits of screening must be judged against negative side-effects, and concern was raised about potential and actual harm arising when people without a health problem received dangerous and unnecessary investigations and treatments as a result of 'routine' screening tests. Controversy raged and only now 50 years later, is there widespread recognition that quality assured service delivery and proper consumer information are essential. In addition to debate over health risks, the cost-effectiveness of such results also has to be considered, making this a highly contested issue.

This book serves as a non-technical, introductory guide to all aspects of screening. The first section deals with concepts, methodology and evidence, explaining what screening is and how to evaluate it. The second section describes practical management, for example how to make policy and how to deliver it to a high quality. It includes many examples and case histories, a glossary to make medical terms accessible to the non-medic, and each chapter concludes with a summary and self-test questions. Although reference is made to the UK NHS, a world leader in screening, the book remains internationally relevant as the principles, knowledge and skills of screening are applicable in any setting. The controversies, paradoxes, uncertainties and ethical dilemmas of screening are explained in a balanced way. Muir Gray and Angela Raffle have been at the forefront of achieving improvements in screening over recent years, and they bring their wealth of experience to this essential text.

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