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Abstract

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COMMENTARY

Brain Magnetic Resonance Imaging Scans for Asymptomatic Patients: Role in Medical Screening

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In a medical era governed by managed health care and scientific advances, physicians have increasingly emphasized disease prevention and early diagnosis. Such a strategy both reduces costs, as it is generally much more cost-effective to prevent a disease than it is to treat its manifestations, and increases treatment efficacy, as most diseases are more easily cured or ameliorated earlier in their progression. Examples of asymptomatic screening programs that have reduced morbidity and mortality are colorectal cancer with fecal occult blood analysis, cervical cancer with Papanicolaou smears, breast cancer with mammography, prostate cancer with digital rectal examinations and serum levels of prostate-specific antigen, and coronary artery disease with cholesterol measurements. Whereas these successful programs have created optimism about developing other screening protocols, it is important to realize that early detection programs can have negative consequences, and only in circumstances in which such sequelae are outweighed by benefits should such programs be implemented.

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