Information on Screening

Key Points:

- Some health issues could be caught early in people without symptoms using screening tests.

- However, not all screening tests that detect diseases earlier improve health outcomes.

- Screening is only warranted if it improves health outcomes compared to other ways of finding disease.

The Task Force produces evidence-based guidelines for preventive health care. Guidelines provide recommendations on whether or not to offer screening to certain groups.

There can be some confusion around what is meant by screening. Below is some information to help clarify.

Screening:

- ✓ Uses a medical test or tool to identify people at risk of a specific disease or health problem. They may be at a higher risk based on factors like age or sex.

- ✓ Is for people who do not show symptoms of a disease or health problem. Test may occur during a primary care visit.

- ✓ Result can be positive, negative, or uncertain. Screening indicates a possible health problem when the result is positive.

- ✓ Positive result will lead to more testing to confirm the diagnosis. Additional testing could be more intensive and invasive.

- Example of screening test: Occult blood testing every 2 years for individuals 60-74 years old

Screening is <u>not</u>:

- × For people who are showing symptoms of a disease or health problem.

- × Used to provide a definite diagnosis. Making a definitive diagnosis requires confirmatory tests, such as a biopsy.

- × The only way to identify conditions. Often, conditions are identified once symptoms are apparent.

- For an individual presenting to their family doctor because of blood in their stools, occult blood testing is NOT an example of screening.

Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care