

Few people are doing it, so why should I? Motivating men to seek cancer screening

July 27 2010

In Germany, several national health campaigns promote cancer screening by announcing that only one in five German men gets screened. This is supposed to motivate men to have an examination. But a new study published in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, finds that this well-meaning message has the exact opposite effect: it makes men less likely to choose to get screened.

In an earlier study, Monika Sieverding of the University of Heidelberg and her colleagues (Uwe Matteredne and Liborio Ciccarello) had found that men who had never been screened for cancer thought that most other men weren't getting screened, either. But Sieverding wanted to know if these men's beliefs about screening rates influenced whether they decided to have cancer screening.

The researchers approached men in the pedestrian areas of two large German cities. They chose men who were 45 or older and had never been screened for cancer. (In Germany, the basic screening for men includes a [prostate cancer](#) exam and often also a [blood test](#) for colorectal cancer.) The men read one of two statements about cancer screening. One stated that only 18 percent of German men had been screened for cancer in the last year ("low-prevalence" group); the other said that already 65 percent of men had been screened ("high-prevalence" group). Both of these statements were true. The first was only about a one-year time period, while the second is the percentage of men who had ever been tested in their lifetime. Then the men were asked if they intended to have cancer screening in the next 12 months.

Men in the high-prevalence group were much more likely to indicate that they would have cancer screening in the next year than those in the low-prevalence group. Additionally, men in the low-prevalence group were less likely to provide their name and address to receive further information about cancer screening by mail, thus indicating that low-prevalence information may actually have a demotivating effect.

"For us it is so interesting because this is very easy to change," says Sieverding, who co-wrote the article with Sarah Decker and Friederike Zimmermann, all of the University of Heidelberg. "There are so many barriers to cancer screening. You cannot change attitudes easily, or the image of the average cancer screening patient, but it is easy to change the framing of the campaign." Health campaigns could easily be designed to make people think that most other people are doing this behavior, so you should, too - whether it's [cancer screening](#), vaccinations, or washing your hands.

Provided by Association for Psychological Science

Citation: Few people are doing it, so why should I? Motivating men to seek cancer screening (2010, July 27) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-07-people-men-cancer-screening.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--