Cancer screening

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PURPOSE : to present a draft Council Recommendation for a comprehensive European screening programme for the early detection of cancer. CONTENT : since the establishment of the Europe against Cancer Programme in 1985 cancer rates have dropped overall by 10%. The Commission believes that these statistics are a result of primary prevention (avoiding exposure to any kind of carcinogens) and secondary prevention - the early detection of cancer through screening of the population. Whilst such figures make for good reading the Commission warns that the rates of cancer in the European Union remain high. It is estimated that approximately one European in four will die of cancer. Another problem identified by the Commission is the discrepancy in the death toll from cancer in the Member States. The purpose of this draft Council Recommendation therefore is to apply the conclusion of the Advisory Committee on Cancer Prevention, which feels that enough evidence exists proving the effectiveness of early detection screening. The proposal recommends: - Mammography screening for breast cancer in women aged 50-69; - Faecal occult blood screening for colorectal cancer in men and women aged 50-74; - And pap smear screening for cervical abnormalities, starting between the ages of 20-30. Other tests may also be recommended once research shows that they meet the criteria for organised cancer screening.