

Protect Access to Prostate Cancer Screening

From: The Honorable Tom Price

Date: 11/9/2011

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Sign Letter to HHS Urging Withdrawal of the Recent USPSTF Recommendation

November 9, 2011

Dear Colleague:

Recently, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) issued a draft “Grade D” rating recommending against use of the Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test – a diagnostic blood test used to diagnose prostate cancer. This is the same body that, in 2009, made troubling recommendations against the use of regular mammography screening for breast cancer. These rulings, regrettably, work to remove the ability of patients and their doctors to make medical decisions. Please join me in signing a letter to Secretary Sebelius urging her to push for the withdrawal of this draft recommendation.

A “Grade D” recommendation is made when there is “moderate or high certainty that the service has no net benefit or that the harms outweigh the benefits.” Yet, prior to PSA screening, only 35 percent of men with prostate cancer were diagnosed when the cancer was curable. Now, this rate is up to 90 percent. In addition, since the early to mid 1990s when widespread use of the PSA test began, the prostate cancer death rate has decreased almost 40 percent while the incidence of prostate cancer has remained almost the same.

Members of the USPSTF are appointed by HHS’ Agency for Health Care Quality (AHRQ), and the task force also receives funding from AHRQ. With no urologist or oncologist serving as a member, the USPSTF went forward to make this recommendation armed with three studies it described as being of poor quality and two studies of fair quality. This is no way to make clinical judgments about the effectiveness of the PSA test. Such a recommendation could have enormous ramifications for patients, when coverage of this test is affected. Decisions concerning screening should occur in a physician’s office and not in a room where task force members sit reviewing studies.

As Secretary Sebelius has responsibility for overseeing AHRQ, she should ensure that the USPSTF withdraws this recommendation that will endanger the lives of our fellow citizens.

Yours truly,

Tom Price, M.D.

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