

Point: cervical cancer screening guidelines should consider observational data on screening efficacy in older women

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Abstrak

Recent guidelines from the American Cancer Society, the American Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology, and the American Society for Clinical Pathology recommend cessation of cervical cancer screening at age 65 years for women with an "adequate" history of negative Papanicolaou smears. In our view, those who formulated these guidelines did not consider a growing body of evidence from nonrandomized studies that provides insight into the efficacy of cervical cancer screening among older women. First, older women are not at indefinitely low risk following negative screening results. Second, recent data from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Sweden suggest that screening of older women is associated with substantial reductions in cervical cancer incidence and mortality, even among previously screened women. It may be that after consideration of the reduced incidence of (and reduced mortality from) cervical cancer that may result from screening older women, the harms and economic costs of screening will be judged to outweigh its benefits. However, it is essential to consider the now-documented benefits of cervical screening when formulating screening guidelines for older women, and recommendations that do not do so will lack an evidence base.