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Nonmedical Information Seeking Amid Conflicting Health Information: Negative and Positive Effects on Prostate Cancer Screening

Abstract

Drawing from decision theory and the framework of perceived ambiguity, this study investigates the impact of seeking information about the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test on men’s PSA test use during a period of conflicting recommendations. Analyses used longitudinal survey data collected in 2005 and 2006 from a nationally representative sample of U.S. males aged 40 to 70 (n=841). Cross-sectionally, non-medical seeking was significantly associated with increased odds of having a PSA test in the past year (Time 1 OR=10.35, 95% CI=4.72-22.69; Time 2 OR=5.75, 95% CI=3.15-10.48). However, lagged analyses showed that, among those who had a PSA at Time 1, active seeking is associated with reduced odds of later having a PSA test (OR=0.38, 95% CI=0.16-0.93). Participants who had not had a PSA test in the past year very rarely sought information about PSA tests. Information acquisition in an environment of conflicting recommendations may influence adoption of cancer screening behaviors.