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## Evidence-based Practice in the New Millenium

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## REFLECTION: Evidence-Based Practice in the New Millenium

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I discussed a case with an attending physician, who was a supporter of PSA screening for prostate cancer. She gets yearly PSAs on her patients, "just to be safe." She was proud to tell me she found an early cancer, presumably thinking she saved the patient's life. I didn't say anything at the time, but I was vaguely aware that screening for prostate cancer is a controversial topic.

The next time I had a patient in for a routine physical, I considered ordering a screening PSA based on that discussion. But before I ordered the test, I decided to check the evidence. I had heard about a website, [www.thennt.com](http://www.thennt.com), at a conference session on overdiagnosis. The website reported on a large systematic review including nearly 390,000 patients. I learned from this report that there is no statistically significant mortality benefit to PSA screening. The number needed to screen to save one life was infinite. The number needed to have a false-positive test and undergo biopsy was five. This makes the risk of harm substantial when the risk of benefit is zero.

When I walked back into his room, the patient actually asked me about prostate cancer screening. I talked to him about the evidence. I told him testing wouldn't save his life and that one in five men undergo biopsy for nothing. We agreed that PSA screening was not something that would benefit his health.

What surprised me about this process was how quickly I learned this information and how easy it was to find. The whole process took me at most two minutes. In this day and age, we have so many rapid, point-of-care resources providing us with evidence. These resources help the patient and clinician work together to decide what is best for each patient.

Upon reflection, what was most important was that a couple of minutes invested in reviewing the evidence made it a) easy for me to talk to this patient about the harms and benefits of PSA screening, and b) easy for him to understand.

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