

Research Summary

Opportunistic screening for lung cancer: the role of informed consent.

Almost every adult in Nova Scotia knows someone who has been diagnosed with lung cancer. It is the most common cause of cancer death and patients most often are diagnosed at a late stage when there is no chance of cure. Lung cancer screening has the potential to reduce deaths from lung cancer and offers hope for fearful patients and their physicians. Unfortunately, however, the screening test has considerable potential for harm and therefore is only recommended in people who meet strict risk criteria. In addition, the benefit to an individual participant is quite low. For these reasons, national recommendations are that even people who qualify for screening have a frank and open discussion with their physicians to determine if screening is the right choice for them.

There is no formal lung cancer screening program in Nova Scotia. This disconnect between requests from primary care physicians and the radiology department at NSHA has led to an informal screening process taking place. This situation is not optimal for Nova Scotians. We have shown that this informal screening has led to screening in people who do not meet criteria for benefit. We suspect that individuals undergoing screening may not be aware of the true risks and benefits of screening. Our proposal will assess the state of informal screening and informed consent as it relates to lung cancer screening. We will survey and interview patients who are referred for low dose CT for lung cancer screening for their understanding of the testing that they are receiving. We will also interview requesting physicians to determine their reasons and understanding of the state of lung cancer screening at the Nova Scotia Health Authority. We will then use this information to create a new requisition form that encourages consent discussions around lung cancer screening and to create information resources for patients that explain the pros and cons of screening.