



## THE VALUE OF DRE

### TO THE EDITOR:

In the February 2004 issue of *The Canadian Journal of Diagnosis*, page 70 reads “Most experts would agree DRE [digital rectal exam] is a valuable and necessary component of a complete physical exam.”

If a DRE’s value in detecting colorectal cancer is “negligible” and the Canadian Task Force does not support DRE for prostate cancer detection, who are these “experts” and why do you suppose they “agree” on DRE?

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### THE AUTHOR REPLIES:

The experts in question are those who determine what constitutes standard medical practice. The DRE is still considered part of the annual physical exam for men over 40. Even if the value of DRE for screening colorectal or prostate cancer is low, it is not entirely useless.<sup>1</sup>

The question arises: Is DRE obsolete and should it be deleted from the routine physical exam entirely? I am hesitant to go that far.

I recall, as a medical student, being told by an attending physician that more lives were probably saved annually by routine DRE than by auscultation of the heart. I doubt there was any data to support his comments, but his point was taken. I suspect the yield on any aspect of the routine physical exam is very low. **DR**

#### Reference

1. The digital rectal exam: Still useful after all these years? *Harvard Men's Health Watch* 2002; 7(8).

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