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Via email: wsj.ltrs@wsj.com

The Wall Street Journal

To the Editors:

To present the most accurate portrait of the options for colorectal cancer prevention, we want to highlight several critical issues relating to the radiological examination of the colon by CT colonography overlooked in your article today, "CT Scans Gain Favor as Option for Colonoscopy."

The recent publication in the New England Journal of Medicine of the ACRIN trial by Johnson et al. does, indeed, indicate continuing problems in the detection of smaller polyps for CT colonography: even for polyps above 1 cm in size, 10% were missed with this technology. Many patients who have polyps detected by CT colonography will still have to undergo complete colonoscopy. Of more significant concern, the researchers only reported growths in the colon 5 mm or larger, leaving unreported and, therefore, undetected an untold number of potentially high risk pre-cancerous growths.

It is important to note that the physicians participating in the ACRIN trial were all extraordinarily well-trained and selected for their prowess in reading the radiographic images through a study design that excluded lesser-qualified interpreters, introducing potential bias into the findings, and creating a standard that would be difficult to replicate in the community setting.

The College works to maximize the number of people who are screened for colorectal cancer and, accordingly, recognizes that, today, CT colonography might be an option to consider for patients who, because of infirmity or the presence of significant co-morbid diseases, would be at an increased risk for complications in relation to colonoscopy. However, the vast majority of patients would benefit from the potentially lifesaving screening of colonoscopy screening using widely available, safe and effective endoscopic procedures.

We believe consumers should recognize that CT colonography does not currently represent a painless or risk-free procedure, nor does it eliminate the need for bowel cleansing which many patients report as a barrier to screening. There is also evidence that due to the insertion of a tube in the rectum and insufflation of the abdomen with air or gas, the patients, who are not sedated and awake, tend to feel discomfort.

The American Cancer Society recently issued a Multi-Society Task Force Guideline on Colorectal Cancer which stated a preference for tests which prevent colorectal cancer. There is no evidence that any radiographic test, including CT colonography, prevents the development of colorectal cancer.

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Colonoscopy is one of the most powerful preventive tools in clinical medicine because of its excellent sensitivity in detecting polyps and its potential for removing them and breaking the sequence of polyp to cancer in a single diagnostic and therapeutic intervention.

Sincerely,

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