Incidental findings made during diagnosis in patient care

Health Council of the Netherlands

Record Status
This is a bibliographic record of a published health technology assessment. No evaluation of the quality of this assessment has been made for the HTA database.

Citation

Authors' objectives
Diagnostic testing can produce medical findings that are unrelated to the individual's primary reason for approaching the health service (or to the symptoms that prompted a patient to consult a physician) and which were not targeted by the testing in question. How can physicians ensure that incidental findings do not undermine their efforts to provide their patients with appropriate care? At the request of the President of the Health Council, this issue has been addressed by a committee specially created for the purpose. In the course of its work, the Committee adopted a broad definition of incidental findings, including both clinically relevant incidental findings and incidental findings whose significance for the patient is unclear.

Authors' conclusions
The Committee takes the view that a responsible approach to incidental findings in clinical practice primarily requires the use of an ethical-legal framework. It presents an outline view of just such a framework. Consideration is also given to the issues that physicians should be aware of during diagnostic testing, what findings a physician should communicate to the patient, and details of patients' positions and rights. Thus one aspect of good quality care provision is that, in general, diagnostic techniques with a lower risk of incidental findings are to be preferred over otherwise equivalent alternatives.

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