Current Status of Nationwide Screening Program in Korea

Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Seoul St. Mary’s Hospital, College of Medicine, The Catholic University of Korea, Korea

Jung-Wan Koo, MD, PhD.

A nationwide screening program promotes the level of public health by reducing the mortality and/or incidence rate of target diseases. In 1988, Korea launched the National Screening Program which targeted chronic disorders such as hypertension and diabetes.

To promote the national health check-up program, the Department of Health and Welfare of Korea decided to carry out a new national screening program called, ‘Screening Program for Transitional Ages’ for two target groups of age 40 and age 66. What is innovative about the Program is that it provides a systematic follow-up of high risk groups and disease groups who were detected by the Program. The new program provides an estimated risk of major diseases for each participant. The Doctors involved in the program is expected to provide specific solutions to the participants through an evaluation on smoking, drinking, nutrition, exercise, obesity and motivates them to modify their health related life style. The Program screens the mental health of the participants which has not been included previously as well as featuring a tailored examination for the groups of age 66. Lastly, follow-up for the positives and the high risk group detected by the New National Screening Program is one of the main issue of the program. The new program improved the level of satisfaction of the participants, thereby increasing the overall screening rate.

Cancer is the leading cause of death in Korea. So Cancer control is one of the most important issues. 10-year plan for cancer control was started in 1996 in Korea. Now the Third Term Comprehensive Plan for Cancer Control (2016-2020) at the national level is being implemented. Cancer screening is actively being performed for cancer control. In Korea, Cancer screening is provided by two tracks. One is National Cancer Screening Program and the other is screening from private sector. National cancer screening program was started in 1999. The Program provides targeted population for five cancers- stomach, liver, colorectal, breast and cervix. Stomach cancer screening is provided for over 40 yrs old, every 2 yrs using endoscopy or UGIS. For Breast, over 40 yrs old, every 2 yrs using Mammography. For Cervix, over 20 yrs old, every 2 yrs using Pap Smear. For colorectal cancer screening, over 50 yrs old, every 1 yr using immunochemical FOBT. Liver cancer screening is provided only for high risk group using Sonography and AFP every 6 months for over 40 yrs old. The average lifetime screening rate of the five major cancers by survey in 2016 was 79.7%, and the average cancer screening rates with recommendation was 63.5%. The screening rate for all cancers increased 1.64 times from 2004 to 2016.