



Posted On: **March 17, 2011** by **Patrick A. Malone**

## **Mandated use of unproven screening practices drives up medical costs with little patient benefit**

A new Texas law that mandates insurance coverage for coronary artery calcium scanning and carotid artery ultrasound was “premature” and will have major ramifications for public health, a noted Texas cardiologist says.

In a commentary published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, Dr. Amit Khera, a cardiologist at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, says that

Patrick A. Malone  
Patrick Malone & Associates, P.C.  
1331 H Street N.W.  
Suite 902  
Washington, DC 20005

[pmalone@patrickmalonelaw.com](mailto:pmalone@patrickmalonelaw.com)  
[www.patrickmalonelaw.com](http://www.patrickmalonelaw.com)  
202-742-1500  
202-742-1515 (fax)

although some of these tests may be right for some patients, mandating their use via legislation goes far beyond what the evidence to date supports.

"I'm not against this technology – I use it myself," Khera says. "But when you go from an individual doctor and a patient making a decision about a test to a statement like 'we should apply this to an entire population, and the evidence is so strong that we need a law,' I think then you need a much higher level of evidence and a more detailed look at all the ramifications."

Neither screening test has been proven in adequately powered trials to lead to diagnoses or preventive measures that translate into reduced adverse cardiovascular events. There is also no real consensus as to which patients might benefit from screening, what level of baseline risk would warrant further screening or what steps should be taken as a result of any given finding.

In terms of calcium screenings alone, Khera calculates that approximately 285,000 individuals in Texas who would be eligible for insurance coverage of screening based on criteria set out in the bill would be found to have calcium scores over 400, and many of these people would already have another indication for taking statin therapy. And, he notes, a one-time screen could be expected to result in 190 new cancers and find 190,000 incidental findings of "minimal consequence" that would inevitably be followed with further, possibly unnecessary tests.

In an editorial note accompanying Dr. Khera's commentary, *Archives* editor Dr Rita Redberg commented that "at a time when states are facing crises in health insurance

Patrick A. Malone  
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Suite 902  
Washington, DC 20005

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202-742-1500  
202-742-1515 (fax)

spending and cutting lifesaving treatments, and when Texas leads the nation in the percentage of residents without health insurance, it is remarkable that Texas has chosen this path."

A new bill modeled on the Texas legislation is also set for consideration in Florida.

Source: [TheHeart.org](http://TheHeart.org)

You can read an extract of Dr. Khera's original commentary in the Archives of Internal Medicine [here](#).

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Patrick A. Malone  
Patrick Malone & Associates, P.C.  
1331 H Street N.W.  
Suite 902  
Washington, DC 20005

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202-742-1515 (fax)