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Evidence of using immunochemical faecal occult blood test on symptomatic patients to detect colorectal cancer in general practice

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Background: Colorectal cancer (CRC) is among the most common types of cancer in Europe, and a leading cause of cancer-related death. Early detection is a cornerstone in improving CRC outcome. However, diagnostics are challenged by complex symptomatology. Using Immunochemical faecal occult blood test (iFOBT) in general practice may be a valuable tool in the diagnostic workup of symptomatic patients in general practice.

Aim: To assess the evidence of using iFOBT in the diagnostic workup of symptomatic patients in general practice and for which patients it can be used.

Methods: Articles concerning the iFOBT use in primary care are identified from PubMed, Scopus and Cochrane databases, using the following search-terms: General practice, primary care, occult blood, immunochemical faecal occult blood test, FIT and iFOBT.

Results: A range of symptoms are seen at presentation in general practice and only a few with high positive predictive value. Studies on iFOBT use in general practice are few and of small scale. The test performance varies according to selected cut-off and investigated population, and some studies suggest a risk of delay in CRC diagnosis when test is negative. However, most studies agree that iFOBT could be a valuable tool for the GPs in the diagnostic workup of patients presenting with symptoms of CRC in general practice.

Conclusion: iFOBT may be of value in general practice. Large scale controlled studies are needed to verify and validate this.