

Will Physicians Stop Performing Physical Examinations?



To the Editor:

I was surprised to see the article about physical examination in the July issue of *The American Journal of Medicine*.¹ I was shocked to see that the piece was authored by the journal's Editor-in-Chief Joseph Alpert, a long-time colleague and friend whom I helped to train. I breathed a sigh of relief when he wisely concluded that a physical examination by an experienced physician benefits the patient.

Let's assume that a middle-aged man presented for his annual evaluation. He has no complaints.

Is there anything that might be detected on physical examination that would need further evaluation and might even require treatment in an asymptomatic patient? Yes!

Here are some important disorders that could be suspected on the basis of a finding by a physical examination of an asymptomatic middle-aged man:

Melanoma

Prostate cancer (prostatic nodules)

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Testicular tumor
Lung cancer (clubbing)
Oral cancer
Lymphoma (enlarged lymph nodes, splenomegaly)
Atrial fibrillation
Aortic stenosis
Aortic insufficiency
Mitral stenosis
Mitral regurgitation
Atrial septal defect
Coarctation of aorta
Abdominal aneurysm
Carotid stenosis
Liver disease (hepatomegaly, jaundice)
Gastrointestinal bleeding (positive guaiac)
Inguinal hernia
Thyroid disease (thyroid nodule[s], goiter)

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Reference

1. Alpert JS. Will physicians stop performing physical examinations? *Am J Med.* 2017;130:759-760.