

Population Screening Act: research into the relationship between sport and atherosclerosis

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Executive summary

Health Council of the Netherlands



The University Medical Center Utrecht and the Radboud University Medical Center wish to carry out a research study into the relationship between sport and coronary atherosclerosis. Under the Population Screening Act (WBO), a permit is required for this research. The Committee on Population Screening of the Dutch Health Council has examined the permit application against the requirements of the WBO and advises the State Secretary of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) to grant the permit subject to the condition that the information provided to the human subjects is modified.

Permit application

Exercising regularly decreases the risk of cardiovascular diseases and increases life expectancy. However, recent research, including the MARC-1 study, indicate that active athletes who participate a great deal in intensive sports have more coronary atherosclerosis than less

active athletes. As a follow-up to the MARC-1 study, the researchers wish to do CT scans on persons who participate in sports activities at a higher than average level. The persons concerned include 316 men (all participants of the MARC-1 study) and 104 women. The scans will be used to calculate the degree of atherosclerosis in the coronary arteries and to evaluate the degree and composition of the atherosclerotic plaques. All participants will also be asked to fill out questionnaires, and blood tests, anthropometric measurements (including length and weight), ECGs, and blood pressure measurements will be carried out to obtain information on the factors that play a role in the development of coronary atherosclerosis in athletes

Review against WBO requirements

The Committee concludes that the research is scientifically valid and that the benefit outweighs

the risks. However, the committee finds that the information provided to the human subjects is not objective enough and incomplete.

Recommendation

The committee advises the State Secretary of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) to grant the permit subject to the condition that the information provided to the human subjects is modified in order to ensure that a clear differentiation is made between findings that are the primary focus of the research and incidental findings (of proven clinical relevance), that the 'right not to know' is assured, and that the privacy of the participants is guaranteed within the framework of processing and archiving the research data.



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