

NCSM would like to highlight the issue of serum tumour markers being used as a screening and early detection tool for cancer. Tumour markers are substances that can often be detected in higher-than-normal amounts in the blood, urine, or body tissues of some patients with certain types of cancer. Tumour markers are produced either by the tumour itself or by the body in response to the presence of cancer or certain benign (noncancerous) conditions.

Many people have the misconception that serum tumour markers (via blood tests) can be reliably used to screen and diagnose cancer. Private hospitals, clinics, laboratories, wellness centres and health companies offer blood tests as part of wellness packages, executive screening profiles and others as method of checking an individual's health status.

The usefulness of measuring tumour markers in the blood as a screening tool (i.e. early detection) for cancer has not been supported by any evidence based scientific literature.

Universally, the use of tumour markers is in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer in combination with other tests. The measurement of tumour marker levels **alone** is not sufficient for screening or diagnostic purposes for the following reasons:

- **It can be elevated in people who do not have cancer**  
Raised levels can be normal in some circumstances and caused by many things which are non life threatening.
- **Tumour marker levels are not elevated in every person with cancer**  
This is especially true in the early stages of cancer.
- **Many tumour markers are not specific to a particular type of cancer**  
The level may be raised by more than one type of cancer.

For these reasons, NCSM does **not** endorse the measurement of tumour marker levels in health screening packages currently on sale to the public. The measurement of these tumour markers is not an accurate method of checking an individual's health status. In fact, the indiscriminate use of serum tumour markers in health packages have caused needless anxiety and fear of cancer in many individuals with raised levels. It has also led to avoidable medical investigations to rule out cancer in a healthy individual and causing them to incur unnecessary expenses.

The only exception to the rule presently is in screening for prostate cancer where a tumour marker called Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) is used.