

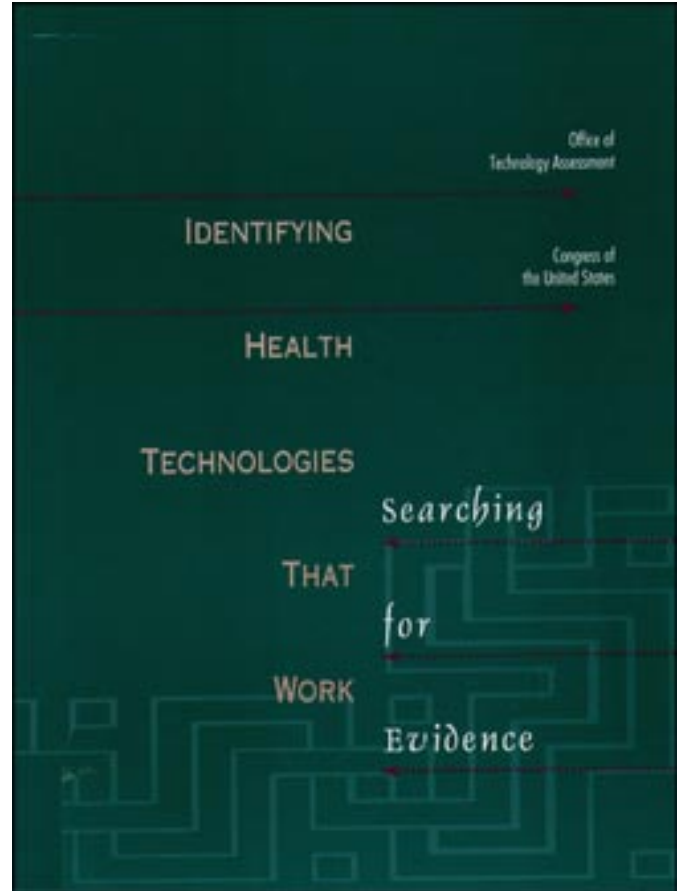
*Identifying Health Technologies That Work:
Searching for Evidence*

September 1994

OTA-H-608

NTIS order #PB95-109617

GPO stock #052-003-01389-4



Recommended citation: U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *Identifying Health Technologies That Work: Searching for Evidence, OTA-H-608* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, September 1994).

For sale by the U.S. Government Printing Office
Superintendent of Documents, Mail Stop: SSOP, Washington, DC 20402 2-9328
ISBN 0-16 -045234-1

Foreword

"Clinical practice guidelines". . . "health plan report cards". . . *'outcomes research'. . . '-inappropriate care'—all of these are popular phrases in the current debate about how to reform the American health care system. Each, it is hoped, will be a contributor towards creating a more comprehensive system that will still be able to offer high quality, moderate cost care. Underlying each, however, is a single basic assumption—that researchers can accurately identify which health technologies work better than others, and that clinicians and patients will use this information in everyday practice.

The federal government is the main sponsor of research to evaluate health technologies currently in use. The purpose of this report is to examine two crucial questions:

1. What are we getting out of this investment?
2. How can we improve it?

The idea of studying health technologies to distinguish effective from less effective, and less cost-effective, technologies is a longstanding one. Many of the techniques now being applied, however, are new, or have new applications, or have received a new emphasis in recent years. Accordingly, these techniques offer fresh opportunities, but they also come with new caveats about their use. By understanding both the possibilities and limitations of current methods of evaluating health technologies, and addressing deficiencies in the federal enterprise, we can take the next step in the effort to identify health technologies that work.

This assessment was prepared in response to a request by the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources. The report was prepared by OTA staff, with assistance from several researchers who prepared background papers under contract to OTA describing specific research techniques in detail. (The collected set of background papers is available separately.) In addition, OTA gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the assessment's advisory panel and many other individuals who provided valuable information and reviewed preliminary drafts. As with all OTA documents, the final responsibility for the content of the assessment rests with OTA,



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Note: OTA appreciates and is grateful for the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the advisory panel members. The panel does not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report. OTA assumes full responsibility for the report and the accuracy of its contents.

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