

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month—Encourage Your Patients to Get Screened

Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that a physician’s recommendation is the most powerful factor in a patient’s decision to receive preventive and screening services. March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, encourage your patients 50 and older to get screened.

Resources to Support Decision-Making:

Cancer screening decisions, like other medical decisions, require weighing the harms and benefits, especially among chronically ill patients. These persons may be at risk for adverse screening outcomes or have a life expectancy that is shorter than any survival benefit from cancer screening. In addition, patient preferences and values must be considered in decisions regarding screening and what test is most appropriate. Several articles shed some light on these issues:

- Walters LC, Covinsky KE. Cancer screening in elderly patients: a framework for individualized decision-making. *JAMA*. 2001, Jun 6;285(21):2750-6.
- Walters LC, Lewis CL, Barton MB. Screening for colorectal, breast, and cervical cancer in the elderly: a review of the evidence. *Am J Med*. 2005, Oct;118(10):1078-86.

The American Cancer Society has developed materials to help support practitioners in discussing colorectal cancer screening with their patients. These resources include reminder letters, phone reminder scripts, brochures, and wall charts, and [are available for downloading or ordering here](#).

The National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable has also published a report that describes the components of a quality screening colonoscopy referral system in primary care practice:

- Sifri R, Wender R, Lieberman D, Potter M, Peterson K, Smith R. “Developing a Quality Screening Colonoscopy Referral System in Primary Care Practice: A Report from the National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable”. *CA Cancer J Clin* 2010;60:40-49; originally published online Dec 18, 2009. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.3322/caac.20048/abstract>

What Can You Do?

Discussing colorectal cancer screening and the various options available can be challenging, especially with older, chronically ill patients. Engage patients in decision-making regarding their options, as it is important for promoting appropriate screening among older adults. Colorectal cancer is preventable, treatable, and beatable. Encourage your patients to get screened—it could save their lives.

More Information for Health Care

Providers:

- [MLN Guide to Medicare Preventive Services for Healthcare Professionals](#) (see Chapter 11)
- [MLN Preventive Services Educational Products Webpage](#)
- [MLN Cancer Screenings Brochure](#)
- [MLN Quick Reference Information: Medicare Preventive Services](#)
- [National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable](#)
- [National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month website](#)
- [The National Cancer Institute website](#)