

Week 4 (March 23)

Have you talked with your patients about their risks for colorectal cancer and the benefits of screening? March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, the perfect time to discuss screening with your patients. Colorectal cancer is largely preventable through screening, which can find colon growths or polyps that can be removed before they turn into cancer. Screening can also detect cancer early when it is easier to treat and cure.

The frequency of screening is based on an individual's risk for colorectal cancer and the type of screening test that is used. An individual is considered to be at high risk for colorectal cancer if he or she has had colorectal cancer before or has a history of polyps, has a family member who has had colorectal cancer or a history of polyps, or has a personal history of inflammatory bowel disease, including Crohn's Disease and ulcerative colitis.

Limiting screening to only these high-risk groups would miss the majority of colorectal cancers, thus screening is recommended for all adults ages 50 and older. In addition, risk for colorectal cancer increases with age; it is important to encourage patients who were screened before entering Medicare to continue with screening.

A variety of resources are available to help clinicians talk with patients about colorectal cancer screening:

The American Cancer Society website has tools for clinicians at the following website:

http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PRO/PRO_4_ColonMD.asp

The Cancer Research and Prevention Foundation website has "Tips for Healthcare Providers" which it compiled based on discussions with physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants: <https://www.preventcancer.org/colorectal/facts/providers.cfm>

The National Cancer Institute website provides information on prevention, detection, and treatment for colorectal cancer—here is a link to its website:

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/colon-and-rectal>

For more information about Medicare's colorectal cancer screening benefit, including coverage, coding, billing, and reimbursement, refer to "The Guide to Medicare Preventive Services for Physicians, Providers, Suppliers, and Other Health Care Professionals" located at http://www.cms.hhs.gov/MLNProducts/downloads/mps_guide_web-061305.pdf on the CMS Medicare Learning Network (MLN) web page. In addition, CMS has issued Special Edition MLN Matters article SE0613 on colorectal cancer screening—click on the following link <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/MLNMattersArticles/downloads/SE0613.pdf> to review this article.

The CMS website also has a prevention website which contains a section on colorectal cancer screening. Click on www.cms.hhs.gov, select "Medicare", and scroll down to "Prevention" to find the colorectal cancer screening section.

Colorectal cancer is preventable, treatable, and beatable. Encourage your patients to get screened—it could save their life.

Thank you