

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month. In conjunction with National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) remind health care professionals that Medicare provides coverage for certain colorectal cancer screenings. Colorectal cancer affects both men and women of all racial and ethnic groups, is most often found in people age 50 and older, and the risk increases with age. Screening can help prevent and detect colorectal cancer in its earliest stages when outcomes are most favorable.

Medicare Covered Colorectal Cancer Screenings

Medicare provides coverage of colorectal cancer screenings for the early detection of colorectal cancer. All Medicare beneficiaries age 50 and older are covered; however, when an individual is at high risk, there is no minimum age required to receive a screening colonoscopy or a barium enema rendered in place of the screening colonoscopy. 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.

Medicare provides coverage for the following colorectal cancer screenings subject to certain coverage, frequency, and payment limitations:

- Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT)
- Colonoscopy
- Sigmoidoscopy
- Barium Enema (as an alternative to a covered screening flexible sigmoidoscopy or screening colonoscopy)

Prevention Is Key

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of death from cancer in the United States; however it doesn't have to be. Colorectal cancer is largely preventable through screening. The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) found convincing evidence that certain screenings for colorectal cancer can detect early-stage cancer and adenomatous polyps and reduce colorectal cancer mortality (see the USPSTF link below for more information). CMS needs your help to ensure that all eligible people with Medicare get screened for colorectal cancer. Talk with your Medicare patients and their caregivers about the importance of getting screened. Patients who were screened before becoming Medicare beneficiaries should be encouraged to continue with screening at clinically appropriate intervals.

For More Information

- CMS has developed a variety of educational products and resources to help health care professionals and their staff become familiar with coverage, coding, billing, and reimbursement for all preventive services covered by Medicare.
 - The MLN Preventive Services Educational Products Web Page ~ provides descriptions and ordering information for Medicare Learning Network (MLN) preventive services educational products and resources for health care professionals and their staff.
http://www.cms.hhs.gov/MLNProducts/35_PreventiveServices.asp
 - Cancer Screenings Brochure ~ This tri-fold brochure provides health care professionals with an overview of cancer screenings covered by Medicare, including colorectal cancer screening services.
http://www.cms.hhs.gov/MLNProducts/downloads/Cancer_Screening.pdf. To order copies of the brochure, go to the MLN Product Ordering Page located at:
http://cms.meridianksi.com/kc/main/kc_frame.asp?kc_ident=kc0001&loc=5
- For information to share with your Medicare patients, visit <http://www.medicare.gov>

- The United State Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recently revised its colorectal cancer screening recommendations: <http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstf/uspscolo.htm>
- The Carolinas Center for Excellence website is a great resource for examining screening rates at a local level: <http://www2.thecarolinascenter.org/crc/crc.aspx?tabid=229>
- The American Cancer Society offers free materials to help clinicians continue encouraging colorectal cancer screening among patients 50 and older: http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PRO/PRO_4_ColonMD.asp
- The National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable, which is convened by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Cancer Society, and provides resources for providers: <http://www.nccrt.org/>
- For more information about National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, please visit <http://www.preventcancer.org/colorectal3c.aspx?id=1036>

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