

Top 5 reasons people don't get screened for colorectal cancer

American Cancer Society, Anthem Foundation tackle testing obstacles

ATLANTA – Living a healthy lifestyle can help reduce your risk of colorectal cancer, but regular screening is also important. Testing using any one of a variety of methods can help find colorectal cancer early, when it's most treatable, or even prevent it altogether. For that reason, the American Cancer Society and the Anthem Foundation are working together to encourage men and women to get screened beginning at age 50. And together their efforts to increase awareness are already helping remove barriers.

With support from the Anthem Foundation, the Society's Community Health Advocates implementing Nationwide Grants for Empowerment and Equity (CHANGE) Grant Program has provided individuals over 128,000 outreach and education engagements and provided more than 18,900 colorectal cancer screenings between 2013 and April 1, 2016.

Though colorectal cancer cases have been steadily decreasing for the past two decades, it remains the third most common cancer in both men and women. This year, an estimated 95,270 cases of colon cancer and 39,220 cases of rectal cancer are expected to be diagnosed in the U.S. and an estimated 49,190 deaths from colorectal cancer are expected to occur in 2016.

"Colorectal cancer screening is one of the best opportunities to prevent cancer or diagnose it early, when it's most treatable," says Richard Wender, M.D., chief cancer control officer for the American Cancer Society. "Despite this compelling reason to be screened, many people either have never had a colorectal cancer screening test or are not up to date with screening."

Interestingly, nearly all unscreened people know that they should be screened. In fact, awareness about colorectal cancer screening recommendations approaches 100 percent. An American Cancer Society survey of more than 2,000 unscreened adults identified some pretty clear ideas about what's stopping people from taking that lifesaving step.

Many of the top reasons people who are unscreened for colon cancer give for not getting screened reflect a lack of awareness of tools besides colonoscopy. The top five reasons unscreened individuals gave:

- They heard the test is difficult or painful, and they may be embarrassed to discuss colorectal cancer screening with their doctor. (Some tests can be taken at home with no pain or discomfort.)
- Because they have no family history, they think they aren't at risk and don't have to be screened. (Major groups like the ACS recommend screening for all individuals at average risk.)
- They think screening is only for those who have symptoms. (Screening should be done even without symptoms.)
- They are concerned about the cost of the test. (At-home tests are very affordable, and insurance covers most costs.)

- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they are concerned about the complexity and costs of screening, including taking time off from work, getting a ride home, and high out-of-pocket expenses. (Some tests don't have these issues.)

Partnerships like the American Cancer Society and the Anthem Foundation make a difference to patients and offer innovative approaches to providing financial help for getting tested, affordable and tolerable preparation for colorectal cancer testing, and transportation to get that testing.

“The fact is, getting screened for colorectal cancer can save your life,” says Craig Samitt, M.D., executive vice president and chief clinical officer at Anthem, Inc. “Colorectal cancer is one of only a few cancers that can be prevented through screening. Early detection helps us catch small growths that can be removed before becoming cancerous. Partnering with organizations like the American Cancer Society helps us to address the barriers and misconceptions about screening, which is a top priority. By continuing to support this critical area, we can prevent the advancement of colon cancer and help save lives.”

For more information on colorectal cancer, contact the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345, or visit cancer.org/colon.
