Dozens Of Groups Meet In Washington, D.C. To Commit to Eliminating Colorectal Cancer As a Public Health Problem

New American Cancer Society Data Show that Investing in Colorectal Cancer Screening Pays Off

WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 17, 2014) -- Dozens of groups dedicated to eliminating colorectal cancer as a major public health problem joined together at the National Press Club to hear new data related to progress in reducing deaths from colorectal cancer and to launch an effort to increase the nation's colorectal cancer screening rate to 80 percent by the year 2018. The event was organized by the National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable (NCCRT), an organization co-founded by the American Cancer Society and the U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

New American Cancer Society data released at today's event finds colon cancer incidence rates have dropped 30 percent in the U.S. in the last 10 years among adults 50 and older due to the widespread uptake of colonoscopy. The study, appearing early online in the American Cancer Society's *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*, finds the largest decrease has occurred in people over age 65, in whom the rate of decline has surged, with the decline accelerating from 3.6 percent per year during 2001-2008 to 7.2 percent per year during 2008-2010. The larger declines among these Medicare-eligible seniors likely reflect higher rates of screening because of universal insurance coverage. Colonoscopy use has almost tripled among adults ages 50 to 75, from 19 percent in 2000 to 55 percent in 2010.

The data bolstered the commitment of groups to focus efforts over the next four years on dramatically increasing the U.S. colorectal cancer screening rates and increasing awareness of the potential for early detection and prevention of this cancer. More than 50 organizations have already pledged to embrace the shared goal of increasing national colorectal cancer screening rates to 80 percent by 2018.

Leaders of the effort started the day with a visit to the White House to brief public health officials on the initiative before an afternoon program at the National Press Club. Richard Wender, M.D.., chair of the NCCRT and chief cancer control officer of the American Cancer Society welcomed guests to the launch event, followed by opening remarks from U.S. Rep. Donald M.Payne, Jr. (D-NJ10). Guests then heard from Howard Koh, M.D., M.P.H., assistant secretary for Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; John R. Seffrin, Ph.D., CEO, American Cancer Society; Nancy Roach, chair, Fight Colorectal Cancer; and Ronald Vender, M.D., immediate past president, American College of Gastroenterology.

Following the formal program, Wender moderated a panel discussion on "80% by 2018," that included Ursula Bauer, Ph.D., M.P.H., director, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Gary Wiltz, M.D., chair, National Association of Community Health Centers; Jeffrey Kang, M.D., M.P.H., senior vice president of Health and Wellness Services and Solutions, Walgreens; and Debra Whitman, Ph.D., executive vice president for Policy, Strategy and International Affairs, AARP.

"Colorectal cancer screening represents one of our best lifesaving tools," said Howard Koh, M.D., M.P.H., Assistant Secretary for Health for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Everyone should know there are several lifesaving screening tests – and the best test is the one that gets done."

Colorectal cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer death in the United States among men and women combined. Research shows colorectal cancer screening tests save lives, but too many adults have never been

screened. Those less likely to get tested are Hispanics; people aged 50-64, men, American Indian or Alaska natives, those living in rural areas, and people with lower education and income.

About 1 in 3 adults in the U.S. who are aged 50 to 75 years have not been tested for colorectal cancer as recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, the American Cancer Society, and other key health organizations, according to a CDC report. There are several recommended screening test options, including: colonoscopy, stool tests (guaiac fecal occult blood test [FOBT] or fecal immunochemical test [FIT]), and flexible sigmoidoscopy.

“We can prevent a much larger proportion of suffering and deaths from colorectal cancer” said CDC Director Tom Frieden, M.D., M.P.H. “We must do more to ensure men and women get screened for colorectal cancer according to the guidelines. Testing saves lives, but only if people are tested.”

This year alone, nearly 137,000 men and women will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer while another 50,000 will die from it. Increasing colorectal cancer screening rates to 80 percent could save numerous lives each year by helping detect cancers early and avoid preventable cancer-related deaths.

Still, patients and providers do not always know about or consider all the available recommended screening test options, and currently, most health care providers and systems are not set up to help more people get tested.

Part of the 80 percent by 2018 goal is to leverage the energy of multiple and diverse committed partners in the community to empower patients, providers, community health centers and health systems to deliver coordinated, quality colorectal cancer screening and follow up care.

“This is one of the great combined public health commitments I have seen in my career and it represents the entire spectrum of organizations who have one goal: to increase colon cancer screening rates,” said Richard Wender, M.D., chair of the National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable and chief cancer control officer for the American Cancer Society. “Each organization brings passion, competence, and creativity to our shared effort,” he said.

Wender also noted that the health care landscape is changing. Along with greater access to care and more assurances that colorectal cancer screening is a covered benefit under most insurance plans, the common barriers for getting screened are decreasing.

“Today is really about a celebration,” said Dr. Wender. “It’s a celebration of how far we’ve come in the last 10 years, of reduced cases of colon cancer, and of our collective commitment to saving thousands of more lives each and every year from this preventable and treatable cancer.”

Organizations interested in being a part of the 80 percent by 2018 effort should visit nccrt.org/membership for details on how they can help.