Report Says Racial Gap Growing in Colorectal Cancer

Atlanta 2008/12/15 -A new report from the American Cancer Society says despite unprecedented progress in reducing incidence and death rates from colorectal cancer, the gap between blacks and whites continues to grow. The latest data show death rates are about 45 percent higher in African American men and women than in whites. The data come from Colorectal Cancer Facts & Figures 2008-2010, the second edition of a report first issued in 2005.

Colorectal cancer is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer and the third leading cause of cancer death in both men and women in the United States. The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2008, about 148,810 people will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer and about 49,960 people will die of the disease. The great majority of these cancers and deaths could be prevented by applying existing knowledge about cancer prevention and by increasing access to and use of established screening tests.

Although incidence and mortality rates continue to decrease in both blacks and whites, rates remain higher and declines have been slower among blacks. Differences in incidence and mortality between blacks and whites have actually grown in the three years since the previous edition of the report was published. For example, in the previous report, the incidence rate in white men was 63.1 (per 100,000) compared to 72.9 in black men, an absolute difference of 9.8; in the current report, the difference between the incidence rate in white men (58.9 per 100,000) and black men (71.2 per 100,000) increased to 12.3.

The report also found signs of progress in many areas since the last issue:

- In the three years since the report was last published, 10 more states have enacted legislation ensuring coverage for the full range of colorectal cancer screening tests, bringing the total to 26 states plus Washington D.C.
- The proportion of colorectal cancers diagnosed at a localized stage has increased among most racial/ethnic groups.
- A new targeted monoclonal antibody therapy, Panitumumab (Vectibix), that blocks the effects of hormone-like factors that promote cancer cell growth has been approved by the FDA to treat metastatic colorectal cancer.

“We’ve made remarkable progress in reducing death and suffering from colorectal cancer,” said Elizabeth “Terry” T.H. Fontham, M.P.H., Dr.P.H., of Louisiana State University, national volunteer president of the American Cancer Society. “Tests we have right now allow doctors to detect this killer at its earliest, most treatable stage, or even prevent it altogether. But as this report shows, there’s more work to be done to ensure all Americans have access to these lifesaving tests, and that those who do have access to the tests use them.”

The 2008-2010 report also includes new data, including incidence and mortality rates by sex, race, and state in table format and map format (mortality only) for easy visualization of state cancer burdens; survival rates by race/ethnicity and by insurance status; screening prevalence by health insurance status; and a list of the most common chemotherapeutic agents used to treat CRC and their side effects.

The report is available in PDF form at http://www.cancer.org/statistics.

The American Cancer Society is dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by saving lives, diminishing suffering and preventing cancer through research, education, advocacy and service. Founded in 1913 and with national headquarters in Atlanta, the Society has 13 regional Divisions and local offices in 3,400 communities, involving millions of volunteers across the United States. For more information anytime, call toll free 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org. # # #

David Sampson
Director, Medical & Scientific Communications
American Cancer Society
213 368-8523
david.sampson@cancer.org