

Health Awareness



What's New In Colon Cancer Screening

(NAPSA)—Although March is Colon Cancer Awareness Month, any time is a good time to discuss new developments in colon cancer screening. And there is good news to talk about. Thanks to several important preventive health guidelines updated last year, there is now more access to, and insurance coverage for, a variety of screening options beyond a colonoscopy.

The Problem

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), colon cancer kills close to 50,000 Americans each year, making it the second-leading cause of cancer-related death in this country (behind only lung cancer). What makes this statistic so staggering is that colon cancer is one form of the disease that can be detected early and actually prevented if people get screened.

The ACS recommends that all Americans at average risk (meaning no family history or other risk factor) begin screening at age 50. Unfortunately, less than half of all those who should get tested actually do, in large part because many are unwilling or unable to undergo colonoscopy.

Consider the case of “Dorothy,” a 52-year-old Boston-area accountant. She knows firsthand how important screening is and how new tests can help get those who avoided screening in the past to follow through. “I’m active, eat well and felt great, so when it came to colon cancer, I figured I was in the clear. Plus, the prep and discomfort involved with getting a colonoscopy made me anxious.” It wasn’t until a friend was diagnosed with colon cancer that Dorothy researched her options and learned about Cologuard, a noninvasive, at-home screening option, and decided to get tested. Her test result was positive and following colonoscopy, she was shocked to learn that she had Stage 1 cancer. Dorothy had surgery to remove her tumor and is now cancer free.



Noninvasive tests make it easier than ever to screen for colon cancer.

Finding An Answer

The low number of Americans getting screened for colon cancer using traditional methods prompted the ACS and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to launch a joint campaign aimed at making more screening options available in order to get 80 percent of Americans screened for colon cancer by 2018. Data from the National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable shows that reaching that milestone would prevent an additional 21,000 colorectal cancer deaths per year by 2030. In addition, several important guidelines were updated recently to include novel screening options. Here’s what you need to know.

In June 2016, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) issued sweeping new guidelines for colon cancer screening, which state that newer methods, such as noninvasive at-home stool DNA testing (Cologuard) and virtual colonoscopy (CT colonography), provide just as much benefit to patients as traditional methods, such as colonoscopy. The result is that patients 50+ now have greater access to and insurance coverage for screening methods that they may never have considered before.

In addition, the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA)—an organization that measures the performance of health care organizations—updated its guidance on colon cancer screening in October. Now, health care providers, health

systems and health plans are encouraged to promote patient health, satisfaction and quality by offering and covering multiple testing methods, including Cologuard and virtual colonoscopy, with the goal of getting more people to follow through with screening. As a result, patients may see more information from providers and insurance companies about various screening options, and conversations with health care professionals should include greater dialogue about which testing option is best for them.

“Colon cancer can be detected at a very early stage if patients are screened on a regular basis. However, because so many are reluctant to undergo traditional testing, access to noninvasive and easy-to-use alternatives is critical to improving compliance,” said Dr. Thomas Mackey, a Professor of Clinical Nursing at the University of Texas School of Nursing at Houston. “The updated USPSTF and NCQA guidelines are an important step in giving both physicians and patients more choice in how screening gets done and that will certainly save lives.”

Cologuard analyzes a patient-provided stool sample for the presence of DNA and blood biomarkers known to be associated with cancer and precancers. Patients take the FDA-approved and physician-prescribed test at home, send the kit to a lab for testing and receive their results in as little as two weeks. Patients who get a positive result will need to have a diagnostic colonoscopy, while those with a negative result should continue to participate in a screening program at an interval and with a method appropriate for them based on discussion with their health care provider.

Newer tests, greater access to them and broader support for colon cancer screening make this the best year yet to get screened. So if you’re over 50, don’t delay any longer. Check screening off your to-do list.

Learn More

To learn more about the prescription-only test, visit www.CologuardTest.com.

Cologuard is indicated to screen adults of either sex, 50 years or older, who are at typical average-risk for CRC. Cologuard is not a replacement for diagnostic or surveillance colonoscopy in patients at high risk for colorectal cancer. Both false positives and false negatives do occur. Any positive should be followed by a diagnostic colonoscopy. A negative Cologuard test result does not guarantee absence of cancer or advanced adenoma. Following a negative result, patients should continue participating in a screening program at an interval and with a method appropriate for the individual patient. Cologuard performance when used for repeat testing has not been evaluated or established. Rx Only.