



Rutland Digestive Services

A Department of Rutland Regional Medical Center

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National Colorectal Cancer Awareness

by Dale S. Janik, MD

Did you know that March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness month? Let's celebrate! I'll tell you how at the end of this piece.

Designated by President Bill Clinton in February 2000, National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month was created as a way to increase awareness of the disease and the tests available to prevent it, thus saving lives. More than 140,000 new cases of colon and rectal cancer are diagnosed each year and nearly 50,000 deaths are caused by the disease annually, but it doesn't have to be this way! It is estimated that with universal usage of the tools available to us for early detection and prevention, up to 90% of these deaths could be prevented.

The great majority of colon and rectal cancers occur between the ages of 50 and 75. Most have NO symptoms at the time of detection. For this reason, screening is recommended for everyone, men and women beginning at the age of 50 or earlier in high risk individuals. This may include those with a family or personal history of colon cancer or polyps, family history of other related cancers, African Americans, or those with some types of chronic inflammatory bowel disease such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease. Screening can either be accomplished by colonoscopy on an every 10 year basis (by far the most effective and commonly used approach) or some combination of flexible sigmoidoscopy on an every 3-5 year basis and examination of a stool annually with highly sensitive tests to detect chemical and immunologic markers of polyps or cancer. When found early, pre-malignant polyps and even some small cancers can be removed endoscopically, avoiding surgery and or the development of more advanced cancer.

Colonoscopy is a generally painless procedure in which a flexible tube called an endoscope, with a light and video camera and about the diameter of a baby finger is passed up the colon and the lining carefully examined for small growths or polyps (the potential precursors of cancer) which are then painlessly removed. The entire test generally takes less than 30 minutes and is done on an outpatient basis. OK, I won't lie! To get a thorough look at the colon it needs to be clean, and that requires some preparation and diarrhea the day before the exam which some occasionally find unpleasant, but it is a small price to pay for cancer prevention and peace of mind.

Here at Rutland Regional Medical Center, our skilled surgeons and gastroenterologists perform more than 2500 colonoscopies each year! Even more impressive is the fact that the endoscopy center at Rutland Regional has achieved and maintained since 2009 the prestigious certification of excellence awarded by the American Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy. One of only a handful of hospitals in either New Hampshire or Vermont to achieve this recognition it is given only to those units that have been able to demonstrate the highest commitment to safety and quality.

So let's celebrate Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month together! How? Ask your primary care physician if screening is appropriate for you. Better yet, ask a friend if they've been screened. I bet they have. You can too. Do it for those you love. And we can all celebrate together!