

Title:

Eliminating Barriers To Colon Cancer Screening

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298

Summary:

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Keywords:

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Article Body:

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However, experts from the American College of Gastroenterology (ACG) warn that too few Americans are getting screened. Colorectal screening rates remain very low, even though Medicare and many private plans pay for screening tests.

Despite increasing public awareness of colon cancer screening tests through the efforts of Katie Couric and others, many people continue to face obstacles to screening. Even Medicare beneficiaries, for whom incidence and death from the disease are highest, encounter problems with access to screening colonoscopy.

Congress Can Help

"Pending legislation in the U.S. Congress, such as the Colon Cancer Screen for Life Act (S.1010/ H.R. 1632), promises to remove Medicare's barriers to screening," says ACG President Dr. Jack A. DiPalma of Mobile, Alabama. "But only one small improvement, the waiver of the Medicare deductible, was approved for 2006, so much remains to be done."

Research indicates that colon cancer arises from precancerous growths or polyps

that grow in the colon. When detected early, these growths or polyps can be removed, actually preventing the development of colon cancer.

"With improved use of colon cancer screening, we can save lives," adds Dr. DiPalma.

The College currently recommends colonoscopy every 10 years beginning at age 50 for average-risk individuals as the preferred screening strategy to prevent colon cancer.

For patients with higher risk factors such as a family history of colon cancer or a previous personal history of polyps, and for African Americans, ACG recommends earlier and/or more frequent screening with colonoscopy.