



Press Release
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The Case for Discussing Colorectal Cancer with your Physician

Education and screenings are critical to prevent complications from the disease.

SOUTH BEND, Wash. (March 1, 2021) – Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a sustained reduction in the number of people referred, diagnosed, and treated for colorectal cancer. This trend has many physicians concerned as colorectal cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the U.S.

In fact, excluding skin cancers, colorectal cancer is the third most diagnosed disease in the nation. Despite the dangers, the disease typically can be treated if detected early through advanced screening.

Generally referred to as colon cancer, the disease is characterized by tumor growth in the colon or rectum. Estimates show that approximately 4.4 percent of men and 4.1 percent of women will be diagnosed with the disease in their lifetime.

“Coronavirus can be dangerous particularly for cancer patients and survivors,” says Dr. Robert Oatfield, a general surgeon in South Bend. “Everyone must continue to take measures to protect themselves from COVID-19 and never put off preventive healthcare screenings. Especially if you are at risk of certain cancers.”

According to the American Cancer Society, almost 148,000 new cases of colorectal cancer will be diagnosed annually in the U.S. through 2022. Furthermore, the disease is expected to cause more than 53,000 deaths per year.

Over the past year, there has been a significant reduction in appointments made with primary care physicians because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, possible cancers, such as that of the colon, can potentially go undiagnosed.

“Your health is now more important than ever,” Dr. Oatfield stresses. “Do not delay preventative healthcare. If you notice a change in your body, especially if you begin to exhibit symptoms of colorectal cancer, then you should immediately request an appointment with your primary care provider.”

Symptoms of colorectal cancer commonly include persistent stomach aches and pains, bleeding from the rectum, blood in the stool or the toilet after a bowel movement, dark or black stools, or sudden weight loss.

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Individuals over **the age of 45** are most at risk. Those who have a family history of the disease are also at an increased risk. In many cases, the early stages of colorectal cancer often have no symptoms. It is not until after tumors grow that bleeding or blocked intestines occur.

Typical with most cancers, the best outcomes of colorectal cancer are attained in those diagnosed and treated at an early stage.

Dr. Oatfield says there are several screenings available to test for colorectal cancer.

Fecal blood tests are sometimes ordered, which are used to detect hidden blood in feces. Procedures such as flexible sigmoidoscopy and colonoscopy are also effective methods to check for colon cancer. In some cases, a double-contrast barium enema might also be used for screening, an x-ray examination that allows a radiologist to view the entire colon.

Your medical provider can recommend the best screening method based on your symptoms and medical history.

Medicare and many private health insurance plans cover routine tests for colorectal cancer. A referral from your medical provider is required.

For more information about colorectal cancer, your risks, and whether screening is proper for you, please talk with your primary medical provider. You can also schedule an appointment at Willapa Medical Clinic by calling 360-875-5579. To learn more about local healthcare programs and services, please visit www.willapaharborhospital.com.

About Willapa Harbor Hospital

Founded in 1954, Willapa Harbor Hospital serves the healthcare needs of north Pacific County residents. The hospital offers a wealth of medical services, including in-patient care, a Level V 24-hour trauma center, advanced radiology services (including CT, MRIs, ultrasound, and mammograms), an outpatient lab, **surgical and endoscopy services**, diabetic education, and more. Willapa Harbor Hospital also operates a clinic under the name Willapa Medical Clinic. For more information, please visit www.willapaharborhospital.com.

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