

## Seacoast Gastroenterology Dispels

### Seacoast Gastroenterology Dispels Ten Colon Cancer Myths

#### March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Exeter, NH—March 2007—While cancer rates continue to decline, colorectal cancer is still the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States, second only to lung cancer. It's estimated that more than 148,000 men and women will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer in 2007. Of those, about a third will die from the disease, which is preventable, treatable, and beatable if diagnosed in its earliest, most curable stages.

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month and organizations nationwide, including Seacoast Gastroenterology of Exeter, New Hampshire, are determined to change these alarming statistics. "Colonoscopies remain the best, most effective method available for detecting and preventing colorectal cancer," explains Dr. John Dowd of Seacoast Gastroenterology. "But we still don't reach as many patients as we could due to numerous misconceptions about colorectal cancer and colonoscopy procedures." Below are some of the most common reasons patients cite for not setting up a colonoscopy appointment:

- Colon cancer primarily affects white men. In terms of diagnosis and death, colon cancer affects all races and genders equally.
- I don't have any symptoms or signs, so I don't need to be screened. Most people with colon cancer have no initial symptoms. Once symptoms do appear, (weight loss, change in stool, pain, or bleeding) colon cancer is most likely at an advanced stage. Screening is the best way to avoid advanced colon cancer.
- Only elderly people get colon cancer so I don't need to get screened. Everyone needs to get a screening beginning at age 50. For people with additional risk factors (family history, obesity, smoking) beginning regular colorectal cancer screenings at an earlier age is recommended.
- Preparing for a colonoscopy is difficult. A variety of easy-to-follow preparations—including both liquid and pill form—are available to help cleanse the colon prior to colonoscopy.
- Colonoscopy is uncomfortable and painful. During the colonoscopy procedure, patients are sedated and usually don't feel or remember anything. The procedure lasts just 15-30 minutes.
- Colonoscopy is only a screening procedure so if my doctor finds something, I'll have to undergo surgery. During colonoscopy, polyps or even a small cancer can be removed immediately, avoiding the need for additional surgery.
- A polyp means I have cancer. Polyps are usually benign growths, but because they have the potential to become cancerous, they need to be removed via colonoscopy.
- Colon cancer is a fatal diagnosis. Actually, when caught early, colon cancer is 95 percent curable. This is why colonoscopy screening is so crucial.
- If I have to undergo surgery for colon cancer, I'll require a colostomy bag. Because of advances in technology, colostomy is rarely done anymore. Today, most patients undergo minimally invasive surgery that requires only a small incision.
- Colorectal cancer screening is not covered under most health plans. Many commercial health plans cover the cost of screening. And in 1998, the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) expanded Medicare coverage to include colorectal cancer screenings.

"Education about the importance of colonoscopies as a preventative tool—not just a diagnostic

procedure&mdash;is fundamental to lowering colorectal cancer rates,&rdquo; said Dr. Dowd of Seacoast Gastroenterology. &ldquo;The good news is that there has been significant progress in recent years in both the accuracy of diagnosis and, with early detection, in the successful treatment for these cancers.&rdquo; Adds Dr. Dowd, &ldquo;We urge patients without risk factors to begin regular screening at age 50, earlier if risk factors are present. It&rsquo;s easy and it saves lives.&rdquo;

To learn more about colorectal cancer and the importance of screening for the disease, contact Seacoast Gastroenterology at 603-772-0222. To schedule a procedure call 1-877-colon12.

- Some of the information for this release was adapted for use from the Colorectal Cancer Coalition&mdash;a national organization whose mission is to eliminate suffering and death due to colon and rectal cancer through advocacy.  
<http://www.fightcolorectalcancer.org/>