March 15, 2017

Dear Provider,

You may have seen the recent news stories, and your patients may have expressed concern about the significantly increased incidence of colon and especially rectal cancer in young adults. The headlines stem from a recently published National Cancer Institute study summarized below:\(^1\)

1. CRC rates are declining in patients > 55 (likely secondary to an increase in screening with colonoscopy and polypectomy)
2. CRC rates are increasing in patients under age 55
   a. Rectal cancer is increasing at a faster rate than colon cancer
   b. Rectal cancer rates are increasing at a rate of 3.2% a year even in patients as young as 20-29.
   c. 1/3 of all rectal cancers now occur in patients under 55

While the study points out the new trend, it does not suggest a remedy, and screening recommendations have not changed and may not change for many years. We at Colorectal Health Northwest believe that we must be more comprehensive in evaluating our younger patients with rectal bleeding or other symptoms. This study shows that it is not adequate to attribute rectal bleeding in younger patients to hemorrhoids alone.

If you have patients in these younger age groups with rectal bleeding, they deserve evaluation as well as treatment. We can provide both evaluation and treatment in a timely manner. Bright red bleeding is usually outlet bleeding and therefore flexible sigmoidoscopy should be adequate for evaluation of non-screening aged patients. **Flexible sigmoidoscopy can be performed comfortably as an in office procedure without the need for sedation or full bowel preparation and at significantly less expense compared to colonoscopy.** For those patients whose symptoms dictate evaluation of the entire colon we can schedule them for colonoscopy. If patients are found to have a benign source such as hemorrhoids, fissure, or fistula we can provide the necessary medical or surgical treatment.

Thank you for allowing us to assist in the evaluation of your potentially at risk younger patients presenting with rectal bleeding. We look forward to sharing in the care of your patients.

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