



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

CENTER FOR GENOMICS AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Spotlight

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Screening Saves Lives

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

In March 2000, Katie Couric underwent a live, televised colonoscopy on the Today Show to raise public awareness of colon cancer and the importance of colorectal cancer screening. March has been designated

Colon Cancer Awareness Month to give national attention to this serious disease. Couric, who is now the CBS Evening News anchor, lost her husband, Jay Monahan, to colon cancer.

Colorectal cancer is the second most deadly cancer in both men and women. The American Cancer Society estimates that over 108,070 new cases of colon cancer and 40,740 new cases of rectal cancer will be diagnosed in 2008. Yet, evidence shows that finding colon cancer early saves lives. Screening tests can help prevent colorectal cancer because polyps can be found by your doctor and then removed before they become cancerous.

Screening for colorectal cancer for most people should start at age 50,¹ according to several medical organizations and federal agencies, including the U.S. Preventative Services Task Force, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Cancer Society.

Various screening tests are available.² These include:

- ◇ Fecal occult blood test (FOBT)
- ◇ Flexible sigmoidoscopy
- ◇ Fecal occult blood test plus flexible sigmoidoscopy
- ◇ Double-contrast barium enema
- ◇ Colonoscopy

People with a personal or family history of colorectal cancer or polyps are at increased risk for colorectal cancer. Inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease) and those with genetic syndromes such as familial adenomatous polyposis or hereditary nonpolyposis colon cancer are also at increased risk. Most guidelines suggest that individuals at increased risk may need to begin screening earlier or have more frequent screening.³ It's best to talk to your doctor about what is right for you.

story continued on back



Katie Couric is a strong advocate of colorectal cancer screening. She is co-founder of the National Colorectal Cancer Research Alliance, a program of the Entertainment Industry Foundation.



Screening Saves Lives (continued from front page)

So, if you are over 50 or have other risk factors for colon cancer, make time this month to talk to your doctor about getting screened. If Katie Couric can do it, so can you. Talk to your doctor about what test is best for you and when you should begin screening.

Notes & References

¹The American College of Gastroenterology advises African Americans to begin screening at age 45. See full text at: <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1572-0241.2005.41829.x>

²“Colorectal Cancer: Basic Facts on Screening,” Screen for Life, National Colorectal Cancer Action Campaign; “Cancer: Colorectal Cancer Screening Guidelines,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; “Physician Consortium for Performance Improvement Clinical Performance Measures – Colorectal Cancer Screening,” American Medical Association. <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/370/preventiveset.pdf>

³“Colorectal Cancer: Basic Facts on Screening;” “Cancer: Colorectal Cancer Screening Guidelines;” US Preventative Services Task Force’s recommendation for persons at higher risk: <http://ahrq.gov/clinic/3rduspstf/colorectal/colorr.htm>; American Cancer Society’s Guidelines for Early Detection in People at Increased Risk or at High Risk: http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/content/CRI_2_6X_Colorectal_Cancer_Early_Detection_10.asp?sitearea=&level=; and the recent consensus guidelines published by the American Cancer Society, US Multi-Society Task Force on Colorectal Cancer and the American College of Radiology: <http://caonline.amcancersoc.org/cgi/content/full/CA.2007.0018v1>

Hereditary Colon Cancer Syndromes & Genetic Testing

Familial colon cancer and hereditary colon cancer syndromes both suggest a person may have inherited genetic variations that increase their risk of developing colon cancer. Syndromes such as hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer (HNPCC) and familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP) significantly increase a person’s risk of developing colon cancer, but both syndromes are relatively rare. If these syndromes are suspected in an individual, the American Cancer Society, US Multi-Society Task Force on Colorectal Cancer, and the American College of Radiology recommend the individuals receive counseling to consider genetic testing.

The Evaluation of Genomic Applications in Practice and Prevention (EGAPP) Working Group is evaluating evidence to assess whether genetic testing for Lynch syndrome (HNPCC) leads to better health outcomes for individuals with colorectal cancer and their family members. EGAPP is an independent, non-federal panel, supported by CDC’s National Office of Public Health Genomics. Recommendations will be posted on the EGAPP Web site.

For more information on EGAPP, visit: <http://www.egappreviews.org/about.htm>.

To see a copy of the evidence review, visit: <http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/tp/hnpcctp.htm>.

For more information on family history and genetic testing, visit us online at: <http://www.uwcgph.org>

Colon Cancer Resources

Find out more about Colorectal Cancer Screening

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Colorectal (Colon) Cancer <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/>

Screen for Life: National Colorectal Cancer Action Campaign <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/sfl/>

National Cancer Institute, NIH: Colon and Rectal Cancer <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/colon-and-rectal>

American Cancer Society: All About Colon and Rectal Cancer http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/CRI_2x.asp?sitearea=LRN&dt=10

Find out more about Genetics of Colon Cancer

National Cancer Institute, NIH: Genetics of Colorectal Cancer <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/genetics/colorectal>

Colon Cancer Alliance: Genetics http://www.ccalliance.org/what_diseaseinfo_genetics.html

National Human Genome Research Institute, NIH: Learning about Colon Cancer <http://www.genome.gov/page.cfm?pageID=10000466>

Know Your Family Medical History: Tools to Help

National Office of Public Health Genomics, CDC: Family History Resources and Tools <http://www.cdc.gov/genomics/public/famhist.htm>

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The goal of **Spotlight** is to educate and update public health practitioners, physicians, and the public on topics in genomics.

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