

Talk to your doctor about ColonCancerCheck

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Colorectal cancer is a slow, silent killer and the second leading cause of cancer death in men and women. According to Cancer Care Ontario, in 2007 an estimated 7,800 Canadians were diagnosed with colorectal cancer and 3,250 will die of the disease. Ontario has one of the highest rates of colorectal cancer in the world. Yet, with early detection colorectal cancer is treatable, with a 90 per cent chance of a cure.

Earlier this year, the Ontario government in partnership with Cancer Care Ontario, launched a new colorectal cancer screening program for Ontarians 50 years and older. The ColonCancerCheck program provides funding to family physicians to screen these patients every two years using a fecal occult blood test (FOBT). The FOBT detects trace amounts of blood in stool -- blood that cannot be seen by the naked eye and may indicate the presence of a cancer. Two per cent of individuals who take the FOBT will have a positive test and will require a colonoscopy for further investigation. Patients who have a family history of colorectal will also be recommended for a colonoscopy. A colonoscopy is a procedure in which a general surgeon or internist examines the lining of the rectum and colon for abnormalities that might be cancerous.

Hospitals received funding through the ColonCancerCheck program to increase the number of colonoscopies performed annually for individuals with a positive FOBT or a close family history of colorectal cancer. Headwaters was allocated funding to perform an additional 277 colonoscopies for these higher risk patients in 2007-2008.

It is recommended that patients with a higher risk of colorectal cancer -- those who have had a positive FOBT or a close family member with the disease -- receive their first colonoscopy at age 50 or 10 years earlier than the age at which the relative was diagnosed, whichever comes first.

This new screening program provides our community with an opportunity to be proactive. Colorectal cancer is treatable and beatable. Talk to your doctor about the ColonCancerCheck program.

Dr. Jeff McKinnon is an internist and chief of staff at Headwaters Health Care Centre.