

2015 Public Outcomes Report

Prevention and Screening Colon Health

The thought of getting cancer is scary; however, for many, the thought of getting a colonoscopy is almost as terrifying. One-third of Americans over the age of 50 have never been screened, even though colon cancer is highly treatable when caught early. This has contributed to colon cancer being the third leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S.

In response, Virginia Piper Cancer Institute – River Falls Area Hospital teamed up with the River Falls Area Hospital Foundation to provide a community event on colon health. The event, Butt Seriously...Get Screened, was held at the hospital on Sept. 28, 2015.

At the event, Thomas Johnson, MD, spoke about the screening options available to detect colon cancer and shared his own experience with colon cancer screening.

He emphasized that a colonoscopy, although still considered the gold standard for screening, is no longer the only option. Regular colorectal cancer screening is one of the most powerful weapons for preventing colorectal cancer because it takes about 10-15 years for the first abnormal polyps to develop into colorectal cancer.

The different screening options discussed by Johnson included the following:

- **fecal immunochemical test (FIT):** samples of stool (feces) are checked for blood, which might be a sign of a polyp or cancer
- **stool DNA test:** a sample of stool is checked for certain abnormal sections of DNA (genetic material) from cancer or polyp cells
- **sigmoidoscopy:** a flexible, lighted tube is put into the rectum and lower colon to check for polyps and cancer
- **colonoscopy:** a long, flexible tube is used to look at the entire colon and rectum
- **double contrast barium enema:** an x-ray test of the colon and rectum
- **CT colonography (virtual colonoscopy):** a type of CT scan of the colon and rectum.

The main point that Johnson stressed throughout the evening was “the best screening test for you is the one that you will do.”

Debra Sanders, registered dietician at River Falls Area Hospital and the Vibrant Health Family Clinics in River Falls and Ellsworth, Wisconsin, spoke about risk factors and diet

recommendations to help improve general health and decrease risk of colon cancer. She explained that, overall, the lifetime risk of developing colorectal cancer is about one in 20 (5 percent), with this risk being slightly lower in women than in men. Sanders stressed that if attendees wanted to focus on one diet change, it was to increase vegetable intake.

HIGHLIGHTED RISK FACTORS:

- Diet
- Physical inactivity
- Obesity
- Smoking
- Heavy alcohol use

OTHER RISK FACTORS:

- Age
- Personal history of colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer
- Family history of colorectal cancer or adenomatous polyps

SUMMARY

The Butt Seriously... Get Screened event was attended by 45 community members. Many more had to be turned away due to lack of space. Evaluation forms were completed to determine effectiveness of the evening. Feedback reflected that 86 percent of attendees indicated they would make lifestyle changes to decrease their risk of colon cancer. The audience was engaged and upon leaving thanked staff for offering the program.

All attendees ages 50-75 who had not been screened for colon cancer in the last five years were eligible to receive a free stool testing kit (including processing costs) to take home. Twenty-three kits were handed out to the attendees and a total of 18 were returned. Sixteen kits were processed with negative results. Letters were mailed with results to the participating community members. Two kits were processed with positive results. A nurse called the community members to discuss the next step. These individuals will be referred to their primary care physician to discuss further screening with colonoscopy.

Continued efforts will be made to accommodate the needs of our patients and to assure they are receiving the right care at the right time to promote early detection and optimal health in our community.