March marks National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, making it the perfect time to celebrate the progress made in detecting and preventing colorectal cancer and to strategize about how to overcome the challenges still ahead. Each year, more than 140,000 people are diagnosed with colorectal cancer in the United States and roughly 50,000 people die from it. The disease, however, is largely preventable with regular screening and is treatable with early detection.

Colonscopy requires special expertise. Gastroenterologists who perform high-quality colonoscopy:

- Follow a set of strict quality and safety guidelines, established by their professional societies, in order to ensure a colonoscopy is performed successfully.
- Take the time necessary to carefully examine the entire colon for polyps.
- Collect and report metrics to document that a patient’s examination was performed completely, in a well-prepared colon, and that care was taken to assess colon health thoroughly.
- Receive intensive training for three or more years, including specialized training in endoscopy.
- Perform colonoscopies frequently, increasing their expertise and ensuring better outcomes.

Colonoscopy: An American Public Health Success Story

Screening for colorectal cancer is an American public health success story. Thanks to screening, fewer people than ever are developing or dying from colorectal cancer.

- Colonoscopies detect colorectal cancer in its earliest, most treatable phase. It is the only screening test that examines the entire colon and can prevent colorectal cancer by removing precancerous polyps during the procedure.
- According to the National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable, this translates into Medicare savings of $15 billion.
- Colorectal cancer screening receives an “A” rating by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.
- Congress has long recognized the value of colonoscopy, declaring it a Medicare benefit in 2001. Colonoscopy ranks as a required preventive health test within the Affordable Care Act.
Challenges to Overcome

While impressive progress has been made in the area of colorectal cancer screening, much still remains to be done.

- More than 140,000 Americans will be newly diagnosed in 2014\(^i\) and the cost of treating advanced colorectal cancer is more than $250,000 per patient.\(^vi\)

- Colorectal cancer screening is recommended for adults at age 50, yet one in three adults (23 million) has not been screened.\(^vii\)

- Current Medicare reimbursement rates for colonoscopy do not accurately reflect its value.

- Colonoscopy is now a required preventive health test within the Affordable Care Act, and must be more widely publicized.

A Way Forward

The American College of Gastroenterology (ACG), American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) and American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE) – the gastroenterology societies – have come together on an important initiative to highlight the value of colonoscopy and the expertise of the gastroenterologists who perform this life-saving procedure.

- To help ensure that patients have access to quality colonoscopies, it is critical that Medicare reimbursement rates accurately reflect the value of this life-saving procedure.

Learn more at valueofcolonoscopy.org

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\(^i\)http://www.screenforcoloncancer.org.

