

Clinical Prevention Initiative



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Media Contacts:

Michelle Hoeft
Presence Communications
505-955-8485
michelle@presencesantafe.com

Annie Jung
Clinical Prevention Initiative
New Mexico Medical Society
505-828-0237
ajung@nmms.org

Gena Love
Comprehensive Cancer Program
New Mexico Department of
Health
505-841-5847
genal@doh.state.nm.us

Screening For Colorectal Cancer Can Save New Mexicans' Lives *"Colorectal Cancer in New Mexico – A Handbook for Health Care Providers" Now Available*

Thursday, February 27, 2003 (Albuquerque, NM) – Today, Patricia Montoya, Secretary of the New Mexico Department of Health, medical professionals and a survivor of colorectal cancer held a press conference to raise awareness of the importance of screening for colorectal cancer among New Mexicans, and to announce the release of a new resource for health care providers – *Colorectal Cancer in New Mexico – A Handbook for Health Care Providers.*

Colorectal cancer is an important public health problem in New Mexico. In 2003, the American Cancer Society estimates that colorectal cancer will be diagnosed in 800 New Mexicans and cause 300 deaths. That will make colorectal cancer the fourth most frequently diagnosed cancer in New Mexico and the second leading cause of cancer death. Clinical studies have suggested that many of these deaths and new cases may be preventable with appropriate cancer screening. Unfortunately, less than half of New Mexicans aged 50 and older have been recently screened. Not surprisingly, more than half of the colorectal cancers diagnosed in New Mexico are found at an advanced stage – when these cancers are least curable.

The risk for developing colorectal cancer increases with age. Most cases (90%) are diagnosed in New Mexicans 55 and older. High risk factors include a family history of colorectal cancer or polyps or a personal history of inflammatory bowel disease. However, about three-quarters of people who develop colorectal cancer do not have high risk factors. Behavioral factors thought to contribute to the development of colorectal cancer include diet (high in saturated fat), lack of regular exercise, and tobacco use. Men have a higher incidence rate and a higher mortality rate than women.

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"As a primary care physician, I am convinced that colorectal cancer screening is one of the most effective prevention strategies that I can offer. By screening my patients, I can reduce their chance of dying from this deadly cancer and may even prevent the cancer from ever developing," stated Dr. Richard Hoffman, chairperson of the Colorectal Cancer Working Group for the Clinical Prevention Initiative.

New Mexico: Both Above and Below the Curve

New Mexico also experiences some disparities among its diverse racial and ethnic groups. African Americans have the highest incidence and mortality rates in our state. Hispanics and Non-Hispanic Whites have similar incidence rates. The Native American population has the lowest incidence and mortality rates for colorectal cancer. The mortality rates for Hispanics and for Native Americans have increased slightly since 1970.

Colorectal Cancer in New Mexico – A Handbook for Health Care Providers, a production of the Clinical Prevention Initiative, has been distributed to primary care providers and specialists throughout the state. It provides valuable information to assist primary care providers in counseling their patients regarding the benefits of screening and also highlights higher-risk categories and the screening strategies associated with these conditions. Using this resource, New Mexican primary care physicians will gain a clearer understanding of colorectal cancer, its screening and treatment, and the physician's role in dealing with this disease. The desired outcome is that colorectal cancer screening will increase across the state. Identifying cancer at earlier, more effectively treated stages will result in better outcomes for the patients and their families and in substantial savings of treatment dollars.

Hope and Encouragement

Getting screened for colorectal cancer may not be an easy decision for most New Mexicans to make. Fear of a diagnosis, lack of medical care, misinformation about the necessity of screening, or embarrassment may hinder many from asking their physician about colorectal cancer screening.

Several organizations, including the American College of Gastroenterology and the American Cancer Society, recommend screening average risk patients beginning at age 50. Mary Esther Martinez, a colorectal cancer survivor from Albuquerque, whole-heartedly agrees with the experts. "Don't die from embarrassment," Ms. Martinez urges. "Do it for yourself and for your family. I'm here today to love and care for my grandchildren, my children and my husband because my colorectal cancer was found early. With my doctor's help and the support of other cancer survivors I made it through my treatment. Now my life is beautiful, full of love, family and friends. I've told all my children to talk with their doctors about screening." Ms. Martinez also supports others who have been diagnosed with colon cancer by volunteering with a local cancer support agency, People Living Through Cancer.

About the Clinical Preventive Initiative (CPI)

The Clinical Prevention Initiative (CPI) is a joint effort of the New Mexico Department of Health and the New Mexico Medical Society. It was formed in 2000 to improve the quality and consistency of clinical preventive services in the state. The CPI has launched campaigns designed to increase mammography screening, childhood immunizations, pneumococcal vaccinations, tobacco use prevention and cessation counseling, and screening for problem drinking, among others. The release of *Colorectal Cancer in New Mexico – A Handbook for Health Care Providers* will support the efforts of primary care providers in educating their patients about the importance of screening for colorectal cancer, and in increasing rates of screening among New Mexicans.