

IMPROVED RATES OF COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING IN AN EQUAL ACCESS POPULATION

Brounts LR, Lehmann RK, Lesperance KE, Steele SR

Department of Surgery, Madigan Army Medical Center, Tacoma, WA

BACKGROUND: Colorectal cancer (CRC) and polyps can be reduced with adequate screening and early detection—for which national screening compliance averages between 50-60%. Department of Defense (DOD) provides insurance coverage for all nationally recommended screening modalities to its beneficiaries. The aim of this study was to report the prevalence and factors affecting CRC screening in a cohort of DOD beneficiaries.

METHODS: We used cross sectional data from December 2007 to identify all patients over 50 years of age. From these, patients were categorized as current or delinquent with screening recommendations. Data included patient demographics, screening modality, and outcomes.

RESULTS: 17,252 patients (52% male; mean age 63.2 ± 8.1 years) were identified. A total of 12,229 patients (71%) were up-to-date with American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) CRC screening guidelines. Modality breakdown included: colonoscopy (83.0%), flexible sigmoidoscopy with fecal occult blood testing (FOBT) (32.2%), air-contrast barium enema (0.7%); with an additional 4,928 (40%) undergoing more than one screening modality. African American or Hispanic background (70% African American, 68% Hispanic vs. 73% Caucasian), younger patients (66.1% <65 years vs. 78.6% >65 years) and male gender (69.9% male vs. 72.1% female; all $p < 0.001$) were more likely to have lower screening rates. Compared to 2005, there was an increase in total patients current with screening guidelines (71% vs. 64%) and use of colonoscopic screening (83% vs. 71%), with a corresponding decrease in the use of sigmoidoscopy and FOBT (32% vs. 35%; all $p < 0.001$).

CONCLUSIONS: Our findings indicate that although ethnicity, gender and age-related disparities are still observed in CRC screening, overall screening rates are improved in an equal access healthcare system.