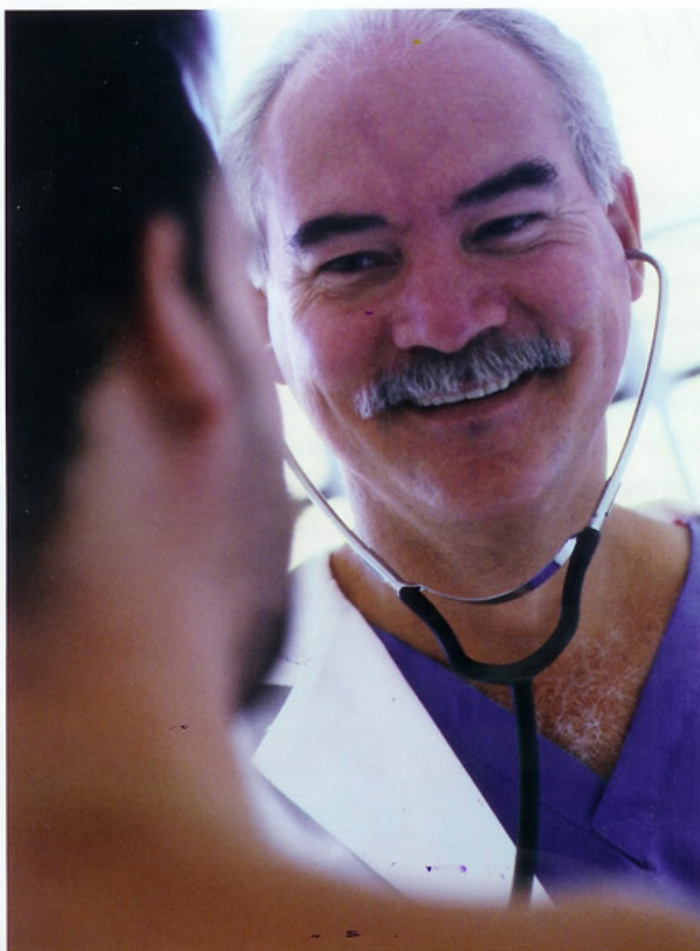


Colon cancer is the third most common cancer in the US, with the second-highest cancer mortality rate. But when detected early, it is 90% curable. In fact, colon cancer screenings often detect polyps so they can be removed before they become cancerous, as was the case with Bob Miller, age 59.

When Miller, at age



colon cancer.

Good Samaritan Hospital colon cancer surgeon Wesley R. Heartfield, M.D., wishes more of his patients had been screened earlier. As an American Cancer Society volunteer, Dr. Heartfield has been involved in an effort to educate physicians and patients about colorectal cancer.

“I often see patients who had

Routine Colon Cancer Screening Prevents Disease

58, began suffering symptoms of acid reflux, he eventually sought the advice of a gastroenterologist.

“While I was having the test that detected acid reflux, my doctor talked me into having a routine colonoscopy,” Miller said.

Colonoscopies, which view the entire length of the colon with a flexible, hollow, lighted tube, are one of the testing options available to screen for colon cancer, polyps and other abnormalities.

“It was really nothing,” Miller says of the procedure, which his gastroenterologist performed using general anesthesia. During the colonoscopy he discovered and removed two polyps that had not yet become cancerous but certainly may have, effectively preventing

been urged by their primary care physician to undergo a colonoscopy, but had put it off, and then ended up being diagnosed at a later stage,” said Dr. Heartfield, who is also on staff at USC’s Keck School of Medicine.

“I think colon cancer is just not something on people’s minds. Also there is the fear of being diagnosed with it. There is a misconception among patients that all colon surgeries result in a colostomy. People should not fear that, because the vast majority of patients don’t need colostomy bags after surgery. We need to get the word out so that people are not afraid to go to their doctor and get tested.”

According to the American Cancer Society, the primary risk factor for colorectal cancer is age, with more than

Good Sam surgeon and American Cancer Society volunteer Wesley R. Heartfield, M.D., urges those 50 and over to begin regular screenings.

90% of cases diagnosed in individuals older than 50. Risk is increased by a personal or family history of colorectal cancer and/or polyps, or a personal history of inflammatory bowel disease. Other risk factors include

According to the American Cancer Society, the primary risk factor for colorectal cancer is age, with more than 90% of cases diagnosed in individuals older than 50.

smoking, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, a diet high in saturated fat and/or red meat as well as inadequate intake of fruits and vegetables. Studies indicate that men and women who are overweight are more likely to develop and die from colorectal cancer.

The American Cancer Society recommends that adults at average risk for developing colon cancer should begin regular screenings for the disease at age 50. Those with higher risk should talk to their doctor about beginning screening earlier.

Dr. Heartfield is excited about many advances in the fields of early detection and treatment that should be available in the next 10 years or so, advances like using gene-based therapy to treat colon cancer and to determine the risk of other family members being diagnosed with it. In addition, Dr. Heartfield said there are exciting chemotherapy agents in the process of being approved that are more effective than those drugs currently being used.

“Here at Good Samaritan Hospital, we use a multi-disciplinary approach to the treatment of colorectal cancer,” Heartfield said.

According to the American Cancer Society, colorectal cancer usually causes no symptoms in its early stages, making screening important. Rectal bleeding, blood in the stool, a change in bowel habits and cramping pain in the lower abdomen may signal advanced disease.

For a referral to a GSH specialist, call 1-800-GS-CARES or visit us online at www.goodsam.org. Additional information is available through the American Cancer Society website at www.cancer.org

