



National Cancer Awareness Month

September is National Cancer Awareness month. Cancer prevention is most effective for those cancers strongly associated with tobacco use such as head and neck cancer, lung cancer and to a lesser extent cancers of the esophagus and urinary bladder. Reducing the risk of lung cancer should focus on those whom smoke tobacco and on targeted populations such as adolescents whom are at risk for starting tobacco use. Avoidance and cessation of tobacco use could potentially reduce the occurrence of lung cancer by about 90 percent.

Certain cancers have established screening guidelines and following these guidelines have shown a clear reduction in associated illness and death. These cancers for which we have established screening guidelines are breast cancer, colorectal cancer, prostate cancer and carcinoma of the uterine cervix. Lung cancer screening is a new and somewhat controversial topic with some uncertainty regarding the best means of implementation on a large scale basis.

These current cancer screening guidelines are as follows:

Breast Cancer – The U.S. Preventive Service Task Force (USPSTF) has concluded that breast cancer screening with mammography and clinical breast examination in women between the ages of 50 and 75 reduces the death rate associated with breast cancer. Screening mammography every two (2) years provides the same benefit as yearly mammography. Women with a family history of breast and ovarian cancer should be referred for genetic testing.

Colorectal Cancer – Screening colonoscopy has substantially reduced the risk of colorectal cancer in the U.S. and worldwide. Average risk screening should start at age 50 for Caucasians and most other ethnic groups with the exception of African Americans whom should start screening colonoscopies at age 45 due to their increased risk of colorectal cancer. If no polyps are detected on the initial colonoscopy then the recommended interval between screening colonoscopies is ten (10) years. If precancerous polyps known

as adenomas are detected, then the interval between screening colonoscopies is every three (3) to five (5) years. Those individuals whom have inflammatory bowel diseases such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis should undergo earlier screening colonoscopies. Those individuals whom have first and second degree relatives with histories of colorectal cancer should undergo earlier screening colonoscopies and be referred for genetic testing.

Prostate Cancer – Screening for prostate cancer has become controversial since the publication of some recent studies. Previous recommendations were yearly PSA blood test starting at age 50. For those individuals with a family history of prostate cancer and African Americans the ages for initiating yearly PSA testing were ages 40 and 45 respectively. With publications of recent studies, current recommendations suggest PSA testing every two (2) to four (4) years starting at age 50 and stopping no later than age 75.

Cervical Cancer (Carcinoma of the Uterine Cervix) – Screening for carcinoma of the uterine cervix should start at age 21 with pap smears. The optimal screening frequency for cervical cancer is not yet clear, but most studies suggest that pap smears every three (3) years offers as much benefit as annual pap smears. Women whom have had hysterectomies for reason other than cervical cancer or high grade cervical cancer precursors should no longer require pap smears. Also, women older than age 65 years whom have had repeatedly negative pap smears in the past should no longer require pap smears.

Lung Cancer – Screening for lung cancer is a new and controversial topic. The U. S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) revised guidelines in 2013 recommends low dose radiation chest CT scans for high risk adults ages 55 to 80 with discontinuation of screening only if the individual has not smoked for fifteen (15) years or has a limited life expectancy from another illness. Those high risk adults are those with a 30 pack-year of smoking, current smokers or those whom have quit smoking within fifteen (15) years.

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