



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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Contact Rosanne Riesenman [mediaonly@acg.gi.org](mailto:mediaonly@acg.gi.org)  
ACG 301-263-9000 or Press Room in Orlando  
Gaylord Palms as of Sun Oct. 5 at 3:00 pm  
407-586-0000 Daytona Room

### **Screening for Colorectal Cancer Before Medicare Age Could Save Millions in Federal Health Care Dollars**

**Orlando, FL, October 6, 2008** – A screening program for colon cancer in patients starting ten years prior to Medicare eligibility, at age 55 instead of Medicare’s 65, would save at least two dollars for every dollar spent, according to a new study presented at the American College of Gastroenterology’s 73<sup>rd</sup> Annual Scientific Meeting in Orlando.

As people get older, their risk of developing polyps and colorectal cancer increases. Current guidelines recommend a screening colonoscopy for average risk individuals beginning at age 50. But for many uninsured Americans, a lack of health insurance coverage poses a barrier to screening. Medicare coverage for most Americans begins at age 65, creating a coverage gap.

In order to determine the effect of a lack of health coverage on screening and the cost effectiveness of screening uninsured patients, Dr. Scott Tenner and colleagues from the State University of New York and New York College of Osteopathic Medicine offered free colonoscopies to 248 consecutive patients (mean age 55) at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn as part of a colorectal cancer screening program. Nearly 45 percent of patients had polyps. Five patients had early stage colon cancer, and 22 patients had polyps larger than 1 cm. These large polyps are felt to have a greater risk of harboring or developing into colorectal cancer than smaller polyps. The screening program cost a total of \$390,000.

The researchers concluded that had these patients not been screened, and the cancers and polyps allowed to progress undetected—assuming the cost of treatment and screening would be delayed until the Medicare eligibility age of 65—the estimated costs would be \$1,295,000.

“Our study highlights the cost effectiveness and the lifesaving potential of a federally funded screening program for the uninsured ten years before they are eligible for Medicare,” said Dr. Tenner.

#### **About Colorectal Cancer Screening**

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States, second only to lung cancer. The ACG recommends that for average-risk individuals, colorectal cancer screening tests begin at age 50. African Americans should begin screening at age 45. The preferred approach is a screening colonoscopy every 10 years. For high-risk individuals, screening colonoscopy may begin earlier and is performed more frequently.

### **About the American College of Gastroenterology**

Founded in 1932, the American College of Gastroenterology (ACG) is an organization with an international membership of more than 10,000 individuals from 80 countries. The College is committed to serving the clinically oriented digestive disease specialist through its emphasis on scholarly practice, teaching and research. The mission of the College is to serve the evolving needs of physicians in the delivery of high quality, scientifically sound, humanistic, ethical, and cost-effective health care to gastroenterology patients.

The ACG is committed to providing accurate, unbiased and up-to-date health information. Visit the ACG Web site [www.acg.gi.org](http://www.acg.gi.org) to access educational resources for patients and their families spanning the broad range of digestive diseases and conditions - both common and not-so-common. Organized by disease, state and organ system, these educational materials, developed by ACG physician experts, are offered for the information and benefit of patients and the public.

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