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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## American College of Gastroenterology Fears Fraudulent Medical Procedures in California Could Create Troubling Questions for Patients with Legitimate Need for Screening Tests

**Bethesda, MD, March 14, 2005** – News on Friday of an elaborate insurance fraud in California involving patients who underwent unnecessary surgical and diagnostic procedures, including upper gastrointestinal endoscopy and colonoscopy, has created significant concern among the nation's clinical gastroenterology practitioners.

According to John W. Popp, Jr., M.D., FACG, President of the American College of Gastroenterology, "Health care fraud is indefensible and needs to be addressed aggressively by the authorities. Our concern is that patients, after hearing this news, may avoid important diagnostic tests, such as colorectal cancer screening by colonoscopy, because they may question: 'Is this necessary?'"

For consumers, this news underscores the importance of seeking screening for digestive diseases from physicians with specialized training and experience in gastroenterology and endoscopy. "Patients should not be shy about asking their physicians about their training and qualifications, the number of procedures and complications they experience, and the facility where the procedure will be performed," explained Dr. Popp.

Dr. Popp noted that one of the key factors for many patients in deciding to undergo colorectal cancer screening, and colonoscopy in particular, is the recommendation of their physician. "It is important that this illegal and unethical scheme does not deter physicians from recommending colorectal cancer screening to appropriate patients based on age and other risk factors. It is also essential that patients comply with their doctor's recommendations about colorectal cancer screening," added Dr. Popp. "We know that with screening and early detection of pre-cancerous polyps, we can prevent over 90 percent of colorectal cancer."

"Consumers and patients should not shy away from potentially lifesaving colorectal cancer screening or important diagnostic procedures for digestive problems of the upper GI tract because of this news," added Dr. Popp.