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HOTLINE & WEB SITE HELP FIND LOCAL DOCTORS FOR COLON CANCER SCREENING

ASGE Effort Part of National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths for both men and women in the United States, but it doesn't have to be. Through proper screening, more than 90 percent of colon cancer deaths are preventable. The American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE) has set up a telephone hotline and a special Web site where people can find expertly trained specialists who can conduct proper screenings for the disease.

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, and ASGE is urging people to call toll-free 1-866-305-ASGE or go online to www.screen4coloncancer.org to find local doctors who are expertly trained to conduct the most effective screenings.

"With proper screening, nine out of ten colorectal cancers can be prevented," said Blair S. Lewis, MD, Chair of the ASGE Public Relations Committee. "But half of the people who would benefit from a screening fail to get screened."

Nationwide, Dr. Lewis said, an estimated 55,000 people will die from colon cancer and 150,000 new cases will be diagnosed in 2006.

"The single best way to prevent colorectal cancer is to undergo a screening colonoscopy by an expertly trained specialist," Dr. Lewis said. "The procedure is safe, painless, and Medicare-reimbursable, and it allows doctors to identify and remove precancerous tissue in a single visit. Thousands of doctors across the country have been specially trained to perform this type of screening."

Public health officials recommend that people over 50 years old, or those with a family history of colorectal cancer, should be screened. Some people are at a higher risk for developing colon cancer for example, if they have a family history of the disease, and may need to be tested earlier.

Because they are less likely to seek routine screening, minorities - particularly African-Americans and Hispanics - are more likely to be diagnosed with colorectal cancer in advanced stages. As a result, death rates are higher for these populations than they are for Caucasians. Recent research has shown that African-Americans are more frequently diagnosed at a younger age, and experts now suggest that African-Americans begin screening at age 45.

ASGE is the premier specialty society dedicated to the education of its physician members in the appropriate use of endoscopic techniques for the diagnosis and treatment of gastrointestinal diseases. Its

membership includes more than 8,500 domestic and international gastroenterologists, surgeons and other medical specialists who utilize endoscopy as a diagnostic and therapeutic method of treatment for diseases of the digestive tract.