

### Focus on men's health

By Erica Geller *The Citizen*

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For a deadly disease, colorectal cancer is incredibly preventable, to the tune of 145,290 American men and women diagnosed this year, with more than 56 of them to be from Cayuga County. At least one-third of those diagnosed (56,290 nationally and 18 locally) will die from the disease, according to the Cayuga County Healthy Men and Women Partnership (CCHMWP).

If left unchecked, the disease will grow, without symptoms, to a deadly degree. Half of all deaths from colorectal cancer could have been prevented if the disease was detected early enough. Tragically, colorectal cancer, known as the only form of cancer that is completely preventable because polyps can be removed upon being found, is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States.

Colorectal cancer on its own is a deadly disease, but it becomes increasingly more deadly when patients allow the social stigma of talking about the disease and getting tested for it on a regular schedule to interfere with their health.

In honor of Father's Day and Men's Health Week, The CCHMWP sponsored Men's Health Days to inform men ages 50 and older about the particular risks associated with colon and prostate cancers.

For some, the issue of getting checked is not the embarrassment of discussing the disease and the testing, but the problem of the high cost of health insurance.

Because of this common issue, the partnership members offer free home tests for colon cancer, called FOBTs, Fecal Occult Blood Tests.

The FOBTs are a cost effective - they are free - way to check for bleeding hidden in the stool caused by polyps. The tests can be done in the privacy of one's home over three days and mailed back to the health department where the results are determined and mailed back to the patient, making the test simple and private.

Such tests, and the colonoscopies, are vital to the health of adults over 50 because colorectal cancer does not exhibit symptoms in the beginning stages.

Checks should be done yearly.

Valerie White, program manager for the partnership, urges individuals who have a family history of colorectal cancer or a history of polyps to have a colonoscopy from the start because these individuals are considered at a higher risk. The colonoscopy, according to White, is the best test because a physician can check the entire colon for polyps.

White holds that men - and women too - should sign up for a screening colonoscopy starting at around age 50, when the risk of cancers go up.

Because health insurance is an issue for many, the partnership targets those who are underinsured, who do not have health insurance or who have a high deductible. Starting with the FOBT kit, which is free to all Cayuga County residents, the partnership, a program of the Cayuga County Health Department, tests the results. If the results are positive, then the program pays for a colonoscopy for the person through a state grant given to the county.



**Angela Kershner / *The Citizen***  
*Valerie White, coordinator for the Cayuga County Healthy Men and Women Partnership, helps Tom Driscoll of Auburn fill out the necessary paperwork for a take-home colon cancer screening kit during the Partnership's Men's Health Days.*

Also at issue for men's health is prostate screening. The partnership offers prostate screening tests twice yearly at outreach clinics in Auburn.

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