

‘COLONOSCOPY PARTY’ GAVE THE PUSH WOMEN NEEDED TO UNDERGO INTIMIDATING PROCEDURE

Colonoscopy lags far behind other cancer screenings for women

Colonoscopy -- just the very thought of the test can send some women running for the hills. Since colorectal (colon or rectal) cancer is the third most common cancer in women, you'd think a reliable test for that disease would be right up there on a woman's to-do list. But it's not.

Women have gotten the message that they should go for regular mammograms and cervical cancer checks. Yet the message about colonoscopy -- another critical life-saving screening -- lags far behind. Research shows that more than 80 percent of women stay up to date with breast checks and about 70 percent with Pap smears, but only around 45 percent get checked for colorectal cancer.

A key reason for this large gap is that many women delay or avoid colonoscopy because they view it as too scary or believe it's something they just don't need.

Vowing to do something to raise awareness of the benefits of colonoscopy, Boulder Community Hospital and Gastroenterology of the Rockies joined up to host a "colonoscopy party" for women on Saturday, March 11. The idea was simple -- taking a more entertaining approach to the screening would make it less intimidating for women -- and make the colorectal cancer message more memorable.

Twelve partygoers arrived by limousine and were immediately pampered with facials, massages and gifts. An hour later, they were rolled away to their colonoscopy screening.

For many, the party was the little push they needed to take a potentially life-saving action.

"I had postponed my colonoscopy for over two years," says Julie Herrin, a Boulder resident who lost her dad to colon cancer a few years ago. "When I heard about the party, I decided it wasn't going to get any better than this."

Polyps discovered in three of 12 partygoers

For some of the women at the colonoscopy party, the timing ended up being perfect -- three of the 12 had polyps removed during their colonoscopy.

Colorectal cancer usually develops from precancerous small tissue growths in the

colon called polyps. During a traditional colonoscopy, a doctor can find and painlessly remove the polyps. If polyps are found early enough, the cancer will be stopped before it has even started. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force estimates that the average 50 year old has a 20-25 percent chance of having a polyp.

The hospital and gastroenterology practice hope the party — which was part of a larger public education campaign — will lead to more women getting screened. They believe there's tremendous opportunity to increase women's awareness about colorectal cancer. The more the word gets out, the more lives will be saved.

Sobering facts

- Colorectal cancer is the third-leading cause of cancer death in women. Only lung and breast cancer kill more.
- Roughly 75,000 women this year will be newly diagnosed with colorectal cancer.
- It strikes men and women equally.
- Studies have shown that women do not believe they are as susceptible to colon cancer as men.
- Colonoscopy is a screening process that can actually prevent cancer because it can painlessly remove polyps before they become cancerous.
- Studies indicate proper colonoscopy screenings could prevent 75-90 percent of colorectal cancer.