Change in Medicare Policy Might Increase Colorectal Cancer Screening

Medicare coverage of computed tomography (CT) colonography might help reduce income-related disparities in beneficiaries’ adherence to colorectal cancer screening guidelines, according to data from nearly 2.5 million adults enrolled in the Medicare fee-for-service program.

People living in wealthier communities were more likely than people from communities with per capita income below $25,000 to undergo colonoscopy and stool-based screening, although there was no difference between communities in the likelihood of undergoing sigmoidoscopy. In addition, people living in wealthier communities were more than 5 times more likely to have undergone screening CT colonography—a noninvasive procedure that requires no anesthesia but isn’t covered by Medicare.

Although colonoscopies are considered the gold standard, the chance to choose other colorectal cancer screening methods can encourage people who might otherwise skip testing to get screened in a way that is less intrusive or carries a lower complication risk. Medicare’s lack of coverage for CT colonography, therefore, might be linked to lower adherence to screening guidelines, the researchers wrote in the American Journal of Roentgenology. – Emily Harris

Published Online: August 2, 2023.

Note: Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.