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## **During National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, Florida Doctors Dispel Myth That Colon Cancer is 'An Old Person's Disease'**

March 15, 2023 – As the number of young adults with colon cancer continues to rise, doctors with HCA Florida Healthcare are using March as National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month to address the chief misunderstanding of the disease and emphasize the importance of a colonoscopy starting at age 45.

“There’s a myth that colon cancer is ‘an old person’s disease,’” explains Meir Mizrahi, M.D., Advanced Endoscopy Fellowship Program Director at HCA Florida Largo Hospital and HCA Healthcare West Florida Division Advanced GI Medical Director. “But the reality is we continue to see a steady increase in cases among younger patients, and that’s certainly cause for concern.”

Not including skin cancer, colorectal cancer is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer and the second leading cause of cancer deaths in American men and women combined, according to the American Cancer Society.

Other alarming trends, according to the organization, include:

- Adults with colorectal cancer under the age of 55 are 58% more likely to be diagnosed with a later-stage disease than older adults.
- Colorectal cancer can occur in adults without any detectable symptoms.
- Roughly one in three individuals in the U.S. who should get tested for colorectal cancer have never been screened.

While some uncertainty remains over what specifically is driving the increase in colon cancer among young adults, doctors say genetic conditions, an unhealthy diet high in processed meats, excessive drinking, lack of physical activity, smoking and obesity are all believed to be contributing risk factors.

Chronic conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis also can lead to accelerated cancer-causing inflammation in the gastrointestinal tract.

“The good news is colorectal cancer is one of the most preventable malignancies,” says Mizrahi. “A colonoscopy not only detects cancer, it can identify precancerous polyps which

can be safely removed before they become colon cancers.”

In response to the growing number of cases in young adults, in 2021 the American Cancer Society updated its guidelines for colorectal cancer screening for those at average risk to begin screening at age 45. Individuals in good health should continue regular colorectal cancer screening every ten years through the age of 75.

“A colonoscopy not only detects early cancer, by removing precancerous polyps during the procedure we can frequently prevent the development of colon cancer,” according to Dr. Alex Crean, colorectal surgeon at HCA Florida Memorial Hospital in Jacksonville. “Plus, the procedure is essentially painless.”

Screening is considered a free preventive measure under most insurance providers and is typically covered at no cost to the patient.

Symptoms of colorectal cancer include bright red, black, or tarry blood in stool; consistent fatigue feelings; constipation, diarrhea, or a feeling of an unemptied bowel; abdominal discomfort; unexpected weight loss; and unusually narrow stools, according to HCA Florida Healthcare.

“This is about spreading awareness for the need to get screened and understand the early warning signs of colorectal cancer,” Mizrahi adds. “We know that can save lives.”

To learn about colorectal cancer and the importance of preventive screenings, go to <https://www.hcafloridahealthcare.com/screenings>.

## **About HCA Florida Healthcare**

HCA Florida Healthcare, a part of HCA Healthcare, is a family of more than 570 affiliated sites of care, including

hospitals, physician practices and freestanding emergency rooms. United as a statewide network in 2021, HCA Florida Healthcare includes approximately 11,000 experienced doctors and 77,000 colleagues working together to deliver advanced, collaborative care to more than 7.4 million patients each year. HCA Florida Healthcare is committed to improving more lives in more ways and giving back to the communities it serves. The network provided nearly \$836.6 million in uncompensated care and invested significantly in innovative technologies and facilities across Florida, including the new \$360 million state-of-the-art, multi-specialty HCA Florida University Hospital in Davie, Fla. A strong advocate for the next generation of healthcare professionals, HCA Florida Healthcare is also a major supporter of university-based healthcare programs and residencies and fellowships throughout the Sunshine State. For more information, please visit [HCAFloridaHealthcare.com](https://HCAFloridaHealthcare.com).

**Dr. Meir Mizrahi** is an accomplished gastroenterologist and researcher who currently serves as Advanced Endoscopy Fellowship Program Director at HCA Florida Largo Hospital and HCA Healthcare West Florida Division Advanced GI Medical Director. His experiences include serving as Professor of Internal Medicine at the Hadassah School of Medicine at Hebrew University in Israel and Director of Advanced Endoscopy Center and fellowship at the University of South Alabama. Dr. Mizrahi currently serves as the Advanced Endoscopy Fellowship Program Director at the Florida Center for Gastroenterology. He also continues to publish in numerous peer-reviewed journals, medical reviews and case reports.

**Dr. Alex Crean** specializes in treating all stages of colon and rectal cancer through a minimally invasive surgical approach, including advanced laparoscopic and robotic surgery. Through a collaborative effort with local gastroenterologists and oncologists, he focuses on providing the most efficient and

effective care for colon and rectal cancer. Distinguished as a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, Dr. Crean attained board certification in colorectal surgery and general surgery through the American Board of Surgery (ABS) and the American Board of Colorectal Surgery (ABCRS). The ABS and ABCRS are independent, non-profit organizations founded for the purpose of certifying surgeons who have met a defined standard of education, training and knowledge.

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