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Preventive tests key to controlling cancer

April is National Cancer Control Month, which is a good time to ask your doctor about cancer prevention and early detection through cancer screenings.

According to the American Cancer Society, cancer occurs when cells in your body grow in an unnatural way. Those cells crowd out the normal ones. Cancer becomes more difficult to control once it metastasizes, or spreads, to other parts of the body. This is why preventive cancer screenings play a key role in controlling the disease.

You can get yearly tests that look for signs of some of the most common types of cancer like breast and colon. These cancers can usually be treated successfully if caught early, so getting these tests performed regularly is very important. And, the good news is that Medicare will pay for most of the cost associated with preventive screening tests – and some are even free to you!

Getting preventive cancer screenings is especially important if you are a member of a minority group. According to the Intercultural Cancer Council (ICC), cancer death rates are highest among black men and women, followed by whites, Hispanics and Asian Americans. Cancer has been the number one killer among Asian American women since 1980, and colon cancer death rates are about 40 percent higher for blacks than whites.

Quality Insights of Pennsylvania, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for the Commonwealth, is helping doctors' offices use their computer technology more effectively to ensure that their patients receive appropriate preventive screenings. You should still have regular conversation with your doctor, though, about these important cancer screening tests.

To learn more about early cancer detection and prevention, please visit the American Cancer Society's Web site at www.cancer.org.

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