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Communications Department
Tel: 01225 82 5849/5799/6230

communication@ruh.nhs.uk
www.ruh.nhs.uk

Bowel cancer screening 'saving lives'

People in their 60s are being urged to take part in a screening campaign which aims to diagnose bowel cancer and prevent it developing in the first place.

The scheme sees men and women aged 60-69 who are registered with a GP sent a self-test kit through the post for them to send back a stool sample to the laboratory.

Laboratory analysis can find tiny spots of blood invisible to the naked eye, which gives an indication that further investigation, such as a colonoscopy, is required.

Since April 2009, 470 patients have been screened for bowel cancer at the RUH as a result of the initiative.

Of these, 42 were found to have cancer and a further 193 were discovered to have pre-malignant growths, which were subsequently removed before they turned cancerous.

Consultant Gastroenterologist John Linehan says: "The screening has been enormously successful and has saved lives because we are diagnosing patients with cancer, or pre-malignant growths which would have developed into cancer, before these patients would have even been to see their GP.

"The screening has also enabled us to stop cancers from actually developing because we have spotted them two to three years beforehand.

"With bowel cancer, the survival rates are much higher if it is detected at an early stage and we will hopefully turn the non-curable into curable by detecting it early. I would encourage anyone who receives a self-test kit to return it – it could save their life.

"But anyone who is suffering from a new onset of rectal bleeding or has had looser stools for three to four weeks should not hesitate to visit their GP."

In addition to the screening, a further 400 patients a year are diagnosed and treated at the RUH as a result of going to their GP with symptoms of rectal bleeding or a change in their bowel movements.

The Department of Health has today launched a new campaign encouraging people to 'Be Clear on Cancer', and speak to their GP if they are suffering such symptoms.

Bowel cancer is the third most common cancer and causes about 16,000 deaths a year nationally, predominantly in the over-60s.

Notes to Editors

Screening is for people without symptoms. If you have symptoms such as rectal bleeding or a change in bowel movements for three weeks you should contact your GP.

If you are aged 70 or over you can request a bowel cancer screening kit by calling 0800 707 60 60.