

Rural areas able to increase screening capacity for colorectal cancer

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Arizona has the ability to expand colorectal cancer screening capacity; this potential increase was more pronounced in rural as compared to urban regions, according to data presented at the American Association for Cancer Research conference on the Science of Cancer Health Disparities.

"Responders estimated being able to increase their screening capacity by almost 37 percent. Our data suggests that the potential increase in the volume of screening procedures is greater for rural than urban areas. This is an important finding given that the rates of endoscopic screening are currently lower in rural areas," said Jose Benezillo, M.S., a Ph.D. student at the University of Utah.

Benezillo's study focused on Arizona specifically, but researchers reported a similar potential increase in screening capacity in New Mexico and a nationally representative survey conducted by the National Cancer Institute showed similar results.

"As people age, they tend to move out of colder climates in the Northeast and into places like Arizona where the cost of living is much less and the weather is much warmer," said Benezillo. "The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by 2030, Arizona will be the 10th largest state with the second highest growth rate."

Most of this growth will come from people who are 60 and older, and this group is also most at risk for gastrointestinal cancers, making the

need for screening paramount.

Benuzillo and colleagues surveyed 105 gastroenterologists and colorectal surgeons practicing in Arizona. Of these physicians, 89.5 percent practiced in an urban setting.

These urban physicians reported that they performed 8,312 endoscopic procedures per week in 2004, and estimated they could increase that capacity by 35.7 percent or an additional 2,968 procedures.

Rural physicians performed 405 procedures and estimated they could increase that by 53.1 percent or by 215 procedures per week.

In urban areas, physicians were most likely to say that they needed more physicians to increase capacity. In rural areas, they were most likely to say they needed more appropriate compensation.

"About 27 percent of rural physicians noted that they did not need additional resources to increase their screening capacity. This suggests that capacity in rural areas can be enhanced even without additional resources in some areas," said Benuzillo.

Source: American Association for Cancer Research

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