

Screening helps early diagnosis of bowel cancer

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(Medical Xpress) -- Patients who attend bowel screening are more likely to be diagnosed with bowel cancer at an early stage - when there is a better chance of survival - than those who wait until they have symptoms of the disease.

These are the findings of new data presented at the annual National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN) conference in Birmingham.

Researchers say the study shows that the [NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Program](#) is working towards its aim to reduce deaths from bowel cancer.

Using data from the West Midlands Cancer Intelligence Unit, the study looked at bowel cancers diagnosed in the region between January 2006 and September 2011 in people aged 60 - 69 years.

Researchers compared the stage at [diagnosis](#) of bowel cancers picked up through screening and those diagnosed from symptoms.

The results showed that 18.5 per cent of bowel cancers detected through screening were at the earliest stages compared with 9.4 per cent of cancers diagnosed through symptomatic routes.

In contrast, late stage tumors were more common in patients diagnosed through symptomatic routes compared with those diagnosed through screening.

Sam Johnson, lead researcher based at the West Midlands Cancer Intelligence Unit, said: “When bowel cancer is diagnosed at an earlier stage, it’s easier to treat, has a lower chance of coming back and better [survival](#) rates.

“Our research shows that screening can play an important role in improving bowel cancer survival by picking up cancers at an earlier stage.”

Bowel cancer is the third most common cancer in the UK - around 40,000 people are diagnosed with the disease each year.

Researchers said that once the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Program has been established for several more years, and has been rolled out completely to people aged 60 - 74 years old, they would expect to see fewer late stage cancers.

Chris Carrigan, head of the NCIN, said: “When bowel cancer is found at the earliest stage, there is an excellent chance of survival, with more than 90 per cent of people surviving the disease at least five years.

“Compared with breast and cervical cancers, [bowel cancer](#) tends to have a lower five-year survival rate.

“This study highlights the potential improvements we can make through encouraging more [people](#) to take-up their [screening](#) invitation so the disease is diagnosed earlier.”

More information: Johnson, S. et al.,. Dukes staging in screen-detected and symptomatic cases of colorectal cancer in the West Midlands region (2012).

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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