

Researchers use imaging technology to screen for colorectal cancer in young adults

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Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the country. While the rates of colorectal cancer among patients older than 50 years old has decreased in recent years due to screening, it has increased by 22 percent among those under the age of 50, which could place a burden on the health care system over the next decade.

Researchers at Boston Medical Center, in collaboration with Northwestern University, are using imaging technology to create an effective and inexpensive way to screen for [colorectal cancer](#) among young adults.

"This is an entirely new issue that we are facing in the medical community, and we're not entirely sure why it's happening," says lead researcher Hemant Roy, MD, section chief of gastroenterology at BMC. "What we do know is there needs to be a way to identify those [patients](#) who are at high risk and ensure they get the treatment they need."

Researchers will use new imaging technology developed by Vadim Backman, PhD at Northwestern, called nanocytology, to view rectal swabs and look for advanced adenomas, markers of potential colorectal [cancer](#). Patients who have advanced adenomas would be referred to a specialist for a colonoscopy to [test](#) for colorectal cancer. Nanocytology allows scientists to visualize particles much smaller than a normal microscope and identify cancer risk markers accurately. The test will be low-cost, and can be performed in a primary care setting.

"We're aiming to create a test that won't take much time to conduct, will be far less invasive for patients than a colonoscopy, and most importantly, can save lives," says Roy.

The research is part of the R33 Cancer Moonshot Project, and is a 3 year \$1.5 million grant from the National Cancer Institute. Once researchers create this test and achieve quality goals, they will begin a clinical trial, which can then lead to regulatory approval and launch in clinical practice. 860 patients will be recruited from Boston Medical Center with the analysis done at Northwestern University.

Provided by Boston Medical Center

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