

For over 30 years, Digestive Disease Group and the Greenwood Endoscopy Center have been trusted to bring quality care to the Lakelands area, and as both physicians and community members we have been honored to do so. In keeping with our continued dedication to the health of our community, we wanted to take a moment to discuss a few issues that have recently surfaced.

Many readers will be aware of the recent death of Chadwick Boseman, an African American actor that passed away tragically at just 43 years of age after a long battle with stage IV colon cancer. Unfortunately, stories like Boseman's are becoming more and more commonplace, but his fame has illuminated the topic and also brought the issue closer to home (Boseman was born in Anderson, SC). Despite the medical literature recommending that colon cancer screening should now start at the age of 45, many insurance companies have still not adopted these guidelines and remain with 50 as their starting age for screening. This DOES NOT mean it can't or shouldn't be done! You can still call the Digestive Disease Group and request a consultation and together we can decide if you have any symptoms or risk factors that should prompt an evaluation. Many symptoms that may be easy for patients to "brush off", we as gastroenterologists may consider "red flags", worthy of investigation. A few examples would include: weight loss, abdominal pain, blood in the stool or even on the tissue, a change in the nature of your bowel habits, or a change in the texture of the stools. These symptoms and others would change the indication for evaluation with colonoscopy and by doing so, essentially force the insurance companies to pay for the procedure. Please remember, it isn't a screening colonoscopy if there are signs/symptoms present. Too often, we encounter patients who need a procedure but never get it done because of the insurance bureaucracy we've all come to know.

Another similar issue revolves around the interval at which a patient should get another colonoscopy. If you've had a prior screening colonoscopy and were told "five years" or "ten years" till the next is due but you are having symptoms, then you CAN and SHOULD have one sooner! We frequently hear patients say "I can't have a screening colonoscopy yet, it hasn't been 10 years." If your Primary Care Provider refers you for "screening" procedure only, your symptoms, if present, are not considered by insurance and it would be unlikely that they would cover that procedure. Therefore, this highlights the importance of telling your physician any and all GI symptoms you are having which would change you from a "screening" procedure to one that is covered by insurance that we call a "diagnostic" procedure.

Excluding skin cancers, colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer diagnosed in BOTH men and women in the United States. The American Cancer Society estimates roughly 150,000 new cases of colorectal cancer in this country this year. It is happening in younger men and women than ever before and is entirely preventable, treatable, and beatable!

The bottom line (gastroenterology pun): if you are having any symptoms at all that are worrisome to you, please do not brush them off. Don't miss out on a chance for a truly lifesaving procedure. Rather, call us and we can work together and with your insurance company and you may be surprised to find what they cover when it doesn't fit their "screening" criteria. Insurance companies can be confusing to all of us, doctors included, but we have experts that understand how to navigate the system and get you the evaluation and care you need. As physicians of Digestive Disease Group and the Greenwood Endoscopy Center, we have a duty to promote digestive health, engage in patient education, and prevent the spread of colon cancer. If you think you may be in need of an evaluation or have any questions, please don't hesitate to call us at (864)227-3636.

Sincerely, The Physicians of Digestive Disease Group and the Greenwood Endoscopy Center.