

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month



Here's a list of events in the greater Seattle area:

- **March 15th** — “Colondar” signing at the Alki Mail and Dispatch, West Seattle. Poster-size photos of the calendar’s models (colon cancer survivors) will become a roaming display in and around the Seattle area. (4701 SW Admiral Way, Seattle, WA 98116)
- **March 21st** — Oncologist Dr. Sam Whiting, Anita Mitchell’s doctor, speaks at the Gilda’s Club Seattle Wednesday night lecture. The “Colondar” is also for sale at this event. (www.gildasclubseattle.org/)
- **March 25th** — Mercer Island Rotary Club holds their half-marathon run/walk for colon cancer awareness. (www.mirotary.org/halfMarathon/)
- **March 29th** — *A Night to Remember* gala benefit at the Triple Door nightclub, Seattle. Fundraiser proceeds go to University of Washington Medicine and the National Colorectal Cancer Research Alliance (co-founded by news anchor Katie Couric). (www.maketheeveningmatter.com/tyrell.asp)

And some national events:

- **March 11th** — The Colon Cancer Challenge, is an annual event in Central Park, New York, NY. It includes a 1.7 Remembrance & Prevention Walk, a 4 mile run, and a 15K Run, in Central Park, New York (www.coloncancerchallenge.org)
- **March 24th** — Do you live in the D.C. area? You may want to check out the third annual Scope It Out 5K Run/Walk for Colon Cancer Awareness, a not-for-profit fundraising/awareness race, in West Potomac Park, Washington, D.C. (www.scopeitout5k.com)



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COREnews

Greetings! We hope you enjoy our news update. We plan to send updates like this opposite our now yearly newsletter. Let us know what you think. As always, thank you for your continued participation in CORE Studies!

She Beat Colon Cancer, Now What? A Personal Story

Anita Mitchell has plenty on her plate this month. She’s promoting a calendar featuring colon cancer survivors—including herself—proudly displaying their surgical scars. She’s the mover behind four separate Colon Cancer Awareness Day commemorations in Washington and she plans to participate in a fundraising half-marathon. All this, and three children to nurture.



But Mitchell’s latest challenge is the one you won’t see: rebuilding her life after surviving Stage IV colon cancer.

“It’s hard because Stage IV is not supposed to be curable,” Mitchell explains. She’s completed her treatment of surgery and intensive chemotherapy. “But every cancer free scan is a surprise for me and my oncologist. That’s good, but it’s also scary because I don’t know when it’s gonna turn [into cancer again].”

Mitchell was diagnosed in February 2005, a few months after her 41st birthday. Fortunately, Mitchell’s body responded well to the chemotherapy.

Most of that regimen lasted from autumn of 2005 to January 2007. Now Mitchell lives in a state of limbo. She no longer has to fight cancer, but she doesn't feel like her struggle is over yet.

So Mitchell channels her energies into colon cancer advocacy. She helped shepherd the designation of March 8th, 2007 as Colon Cancer Awareness Day in Seattle, King County, Tukwila, and Port Angeles. The achievement held a personal meaning: the commemorations honored Mitchell's close friend Carmen Mitchell (no family relation), who died of colon cancer that day in 2006.

Anita Mitchell has also testified before state legislators on behalf of a proposed bill to require insurance coverage for colorectal cancer screening. (See accompanying article.) She says helping others can be fulfilling, but still difficult as she watches people her age lose their battles with cancer. But Mitchell sounds hopeful when she says, "I just have to get used to the new normal."

Anita's Advice

- Don't be afraid to get a second opinion. Also, if your doctor doesn't seem to take your concerns seriously, don't be afraid to go elsewhere.
- Get to know your family medical history, and the colon cancer screening guidelines. Anita's father died of colon cancer at age 45. According to screening guidelines, Anita should have been screened for the disease at age 35. Her children will need to be screened at about the same age.
- Be diligent with regular colonoscopies. Anita's fecal occult blood test (FOBT), a less-invasive screening test than colonoscopy, came back negative.

For more of Anita Mitchell's story, go to the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance website at www.seattlecca.org. You can also watch a video about Anita and her friend Carmen at <http://www2.healthtalk.com/go/cancer/colon-cancer>.

Colorectal Cancer Screening for Those Who Need it Most

Scientists at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center are lending their muscle to a new push for colorectal cancer screening.

Dr. Polly Newcomb, Investigator for CORE Family Studies, testified recently before the Washington state legislature in support of a proposed bill, which would add new sections to existing Washington state law to mandate colorectal cancer screening coverage.

In her testimony, Dr. Newcomb emphasized the effectiveness of early cancer detection. "In fact, greater than 90% of patients diagnosed with early-stage colorectal cancer—before the disease has spread beyond the site of the original tumor—survive more than five years," she said. In contrast, only 8% of patients with late-stage colorectal cancer survive beyond the five-year mark. Unfortunately, doctors discover less than half of these cancers in their early stages.

If the bill passes, individuals would be covered for screening exams and laboratory tests specified in the November 2002 American Cancer Society (ACS) guidelines on those who do not show signs of colorectal cancer. This includes people who are at least fifty years old, as well as younger people at high risk for the disease.

These additions to the law would apply to the following insurance coverage:

- Group disability insurance contracts
- Blanket disability insurance contracts
- Health benefit plans offered by health service contractors and health maintenance organizations (HMOs).



Dr. Polly Newcomb,
CORE Family Studies
Investigator

Coverage or benefits must be provided at the frequency recommended by the ACS guidelines, after a patient-physician consultation.

Dr. Newcomb's testimony also pointed to research that shows screening helps to reduce the numbers of those who develop cancer. Her study of Washington residents who had undergone a sigmoidoscopy test demonstrated an 80% drop in people developing cancer.

If lawmakers approve the new legislation, the law could go into effect by July 2007.



Contact us! Have you moved? Are you planning to move? Give us a call or email and let us know **1-800-276-0127** or speterso@fhcrc.org.

