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Crunch time for bowel cancer awareness

If you are over 50 years old, now is a good time to be tested for bowel cancer – one of the most curable types of cancers if detected early, says Associate Professor Stephen Della-Fiorentina, Director of the Macarthur Cancer Therapy Centre, in support of Bowel Cancer Awareness Month.

A/Prof Della-Fiorentina said bowel cancer was the second most common cancer, with 1 in 18 men and 1 in 27 women diagnosed with the disease. In 2014 over 200 patients with bowel cancer were treated at the Macarthur Cancer Therapy Centre.

“Bowel cancer is the second biggest cancer killer of Australians, after lung cancer and, sadly 77 Australians lose their lives to this cancer every week,” A/Prof Della-Fiorentina said.

“The good news is that bowel cancer is one of the most curable types of cancer if detected early. Furthermore, often less treatment is required if they catch the disease early, than if the cancer is detected later.

“Those at a higher risk of developing the disease or experiencing symptoms are strongly encouraged to consult their doctor to discuss their options,” he said.

A/Prof Della-Fiorentina said both men and women were at risk of developing bowel cancer. The risk of developing bowel cancer is greater if you:

- are aged 50 years or over
- have a family history of bowel cancer
- have a personal history of cancer of the colon, rectum, ovary, endometrium, or breast
- have a history of polyps in the colon
- have a history of ulcerative colitis (ulcers in the lining of the large intestine) or Crohn's disease
- have certain hereditary conditions, such as familial adenomatous polyposis and hereditary non-polyposis colon cancer (HNPCC; Lynch Syndrome)

“People in these categories should consult with their local GP and discuss possibly undergoing a sample of your bowel motions looking for blood or a colonoscopy examination of the bowel, which involves a specialist having a look at the inside of the bowel with a camera,” A/Prof Della-Fiorentina said.

While no cancer is completely preventable, you can lower your risk of bowel cancer by eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly. You should:

- eat plenty of vegetables, legumes (dried beans, peas or lentils), fruits and cereals (breads, rice, pasta & noodles), preferably wholegrain
- include lean meat, fish and poultry.
- include milks, yoghurts and cheeses. Reduced fat varieties where possible.
- drink plenty of water
- quit smoking.

For more information visit: <http://www.bowelcancerawarenessmonth.org/>