

Colorectal Cancer Treatment Program provides integrated care



While the overall incidence of colorectal cancer — the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States — has been on the decline, colorectal cancer in the younger-than-50 age group is on the rise. Because colorectal cancer is not routinely screened for before age 50, these younger patients tend to present with more advanced colorectal cancer, which increases the complexity of their care. UCLA's Colorectal Cancer Treatment Program is designed to coordinate and integrate the expertise of a multidisciplinary team of specialists so that patients with both early and advanced-stage colorectal cancer can receive the best possible care.

UCLA offers a comprehensive range of treatments for colorectal cancer including laparoscopic surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy and biologic therapy. Biologic treatments include both anti-angiogenesis therapy, which starves tumors of blood flow, and Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor (EGFR) Inhibitors, which block the EGFR protein believed to contribute to the growth of colorectal cancer.

UCLA Colorectal Cancer Treatment Program improves coordination of care

Patients diagnosed with early to advanced colorectal cancer can rest assured they are receiving the best and most integrated care available through UCLA's Colorectal Cancer Treatment Program, which simplifies how patients and their specialists communicate with one another.

“The whole point of this program is to make it easy for referring doctors and patients to be able to see our colorectal cancer team in a way that's simple and integrated,” says James Yoo, M.D., who is co-director of the program and UCLA's chief of Colon and Rectal Surgery. “We do the organizing so patients don't have to worry about that aspect of their care.”

The program provides patients and their referring physicians with written and oral recommendations and weekly updates about their plan of care. The treatment team works closely with researchers, making it easy for qualified patients to enter clinical trials of new treatment protocols for colorectal cancer. An Inherited Colorectal Cancer Program and Registry will also be offered to patients and family members who may be at risk for inherited cancer syndromes.

Patients in the program can also benefit by participating in some of the newest and most advanced forms of therapy available through clinical trials underway at UCLA. Clinical trials are carefully controlled research studies that allow patients to have access to new treatment options that are not widely available outside the university setting. UCLA researchers studying colorectal cancer have conducted clinical trials on experimental drug regimens and new diagnostic techniques that have helped doctors and scientists establish new treatments for patients with colorectal cancer.

The genetic component of colorectal cancer

Patients younger than 50 years who are diagnosed with colorectal cancer and those who have a family history of colorectal cancer may have an inherited colorectal cancer syndrome such as Familial Adenomatous Polyposis (FAP) or Hereditary Nonpolyposis Colon Cancer (HNPCC). Patients or family members who may be at risk can receive genetic counseling and guidance about treatment and preventive measures through our Inherited Colorectal Cancer Program. This program includes a multidisciplinary team of experts dedicated to improving the care of patients with inherited colorectal cancer syndromes. Our high-risk clinic provides patients the convenience of seeing multiple specialists on the same day. Our Registry will provide timely coordination of care such as patient reminders for routine postoperative surveillance or annual screening colonoscopies for those at high risk. The Registry and its associated research projects will also enable us to study how these cancers develop and how we might be better able to treat and prevent inherited colorectal cancers.

How the program works

Appointments with various specialists are scheduled for the same day whenever possible. A specialized care coordinator then ensures that all lab work, radiographs and endoscopic tests are completed within a week of referral. The medical team — including oncologists, gastroenterologists, surgeons, geneticists, radiation oncologists and pathologists — meets weekly to develop and monitor each patient's plan of care. The team provides patients and their referring physicians with written and oral summaries of their recommendations. The team also works closely with researchers to identify qualified patients who may benefit from clinical trials in novel therapies for colorectal cancer.

Program Team

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