Cancer rates above average in Calvert

Posted by Alan Van Wormer  On 02/03/2018

Prince Frederick, MD — According to the American Cancer Society, the death rate from cancer in the U.S. has declined steadily over the past two decades—falling 25 percent between 1991 and 2014. Prevention efforts, new screening methods that facilitate early detection of cancer and advancements in treatment have all contributed to the gains realized.

In Calvert County, unfortunately, the news isn’t quite as favorable. The 2017 Calvert County Community Health Needs Assessment indicates that, compared to the country as a whole and other counties in Maryland, Calvert has both a higher incidence and higher death rate for cancers of the breast, prostate and lung. These three cancer types account for 60 percent of all cancer deaths in Calvert; colorectal cancer and skin cancer round out the top five for the county.

“Although we still don’t know exactly what causes cancer in one person and not another person [with the same risk factors], we do know that the risk of developing many types of cancer can be lowered through primary prevention strategies,” said Dr. Ken Abbott, board-certified medical oncologist and chairman of the CalvertHealth Cancer Committee. “By not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, using alcohol in moderation, avoiding known cancer-causing agents and protecting yourself from ultraviolet radiation for example, you can lower your cancer risk.”

Dr. Arati Patel, medical oncologist and director of the breast and thoracic cancer programs at CalvertHealth added, “As physicians, we think about helping patients prevent cancer by modifying the behaviors that lead to known risk factors, detecting cancer at its earliest stages by making sure patients engage in appropriate and evidence-based cancer screening, and treating cancer using the latest tools and techniques based on constantly evolving science and national treatment guidelines.”

“Not every risk factor for cancer is within an individual’s control,” said Dr. Patel, “but we do know that healthy eating habits, regular physical activity, quitting smoking, limiting alcohol use, protecting your skin and maintaining good sleep habits will make you feel better while also decreasing your overall lifetime risk of developing many diseases including cancer.”

Timely Screening Vital to Early Detection

In addition to lowering cancer risk through lifestyle changes, regular screenings can play an important role in cancer outcomes by helping detect several types of cancer at earlier stages when it is usually more easily treated.

“One of the first questions from primary care providers will be about your family’s medical history. This crucial information can help guide decisions on the need for genetic testing or a more individualized screening plan,” said Sandra Corbin, nurse practitioner and genetic counselor at CalvertHealth.

While every person is unique, CalvertHealth’s oncology team generally recommends following the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) guidelines for cancer screening. For guidelines, visit https://www.calverthealthmedicine.org/CancerScreeningGuidelines.

February is National Cancer Prevention Month and individuals with the help of their doctor can assess their cancer risk and develop a plan for prevention and early detection.

Testing services available locally at CalvertHealth locations throughout the county include: colonoscopy for the prevention and early detection of colon cancer; 3-D mammography, the latest technology for the early detection of breast cancer; and low-dose CT screening for those at high risk for lung cancer. There is also a genetic counseling program, a high-risk breast clinic and a high-risk lung clinic available. CalvertHealth’s Mobile Health Center also provides assessment and some screening services to underserved areas in the community.

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