



NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health Services
BC Cancer Agency

COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING PILOT FOR POWELL RIVER

POWELL RIVER – Powell River is the second B.C. community to pilot a colorectal cancer screening program, Health Services Minister Kevin Falcon announced today.

Led by the BC Cancer Agency, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA), the \$3.8-million Colon Check pilot program was launched in Penticton in January 2009.

“This year, an estimated 2,800 British Columbians will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer, and in the same time period more than 1,100 people in the province will die of the disease,” said Falcon. “Early diagnosis is a key factor in improved outcomes for colorectal cancer patients and it is great news for this community that eligible residents will have access to a new comprehensive program with screening and follow-up.”

Screening test kits are available to the approximately 7,500 eligible individuals between the ages of 50 and 74 living in Powell River. Program participants will be screened using an immunochemical fecal occult blood test (iFOBT), which is able to detect blood in the stool that is not visible to the naked eye. The test is easily performed at home and, unlike other colorectal cancer screening tests, does not require any dietary restrictions.

“Early screening for colorectal cancer can literally save lives and this pilot program is great news for residents of our community,” said Powell River Mayor Stewart Alsgard. “Colorectal cancer often has no warning signs, but if caught early it is highly curable. Testing only takes a few minutes and catching this disease early can make all the difference.”

All screening tests will be analyzed in the PHSA central processing and receiving laboratory in Vancouver. Patients who have an abnormal test result, as well as those individuals identified as having a higher than average risk of developing colorectal cancer, will be referred for follow-up.

“Colorectal screening is recognized as a valuable program, which can help diagnose disease early, when treatment is highly effective,” said Dr. Pawel Makarewicz, a Powell River surgeon and Colon Check program advocate. “This program has already been successfully implemented in Penticton, and the participating doctors in our community are enthusiastic about being part of the second pilot.”

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If colorectal cancer is found and treated in the earliest stages, the chance of survival is over 90 per cent. However, people with this type of cancer often exhibit no symptoms and the risk of developing the disease increases with age, particularly after age 50. Screening can detect colorectal cancer before symptoms appear.

“Every day in B.C. three people die of colorectal cancer, making it the second leading cause of cancer death in the province,” said Brian Schmidt, interim president of the BC Cancer Agency. “Through the first phase of this pilot we have already screened more than 1,000 residents and as a result, we have obtained valuable data that is helping us analyse the effectiveness of this testing method while raising awareness of the importance of early detection.”

The Colon Check pilot will run until December 2010, and the results will then be analyzed to determine the feasibility of expanding the program provincewide.

Colon Check supports B.C.’s overall Cancer Control Strategy and is part of the BC Cancer Agency’s comprehensive cancer-screening program that includes the screening mammography program and cervical cancer screening.

For more information on the Colon Check, please call 1-877-70-COLON (1-877-702-6566) or visit <http://coloncheck.bccancer.bc.ca/>.

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