

BOWEL CANCER SCREENING PROGRAM IMPROVES POST-OPERATIVE OUTCOMES

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:01am Monday 7 December 2020

THE Australian National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) not only reduces the risk of death from colorectal cancer for those who get tested, but also provides short term post-operative benefits for those patients who are treated with surgery, according to the authors of research published today by the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Dr Sasha Taylor, a Public Health Fellow at Monash University's School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, and colleagues analysed de-identified data from the Binational Colorectal Cancer Audit (BCCA) for patients aged 18 years or over who underwent surgery in Australia for colorectal cancer during January 2007 – December 2018.

NBCSP-detected patients were less likely to have post-operative surgical or medical complications; their length of stay was also briefer. Post-operative mortality and return to theatre rates were not different for screened and other patients.

“Our analysis of BCCA data indicates that, in addition to the lower long-term mortality associated with the NBCSP [shown in other research], short term post-operative benefits are also evident that should be taken into account when promoting the program,” Taylor and colleagues concluded.

“Our study reinforces calls to improve participation rates in the national screening program by eligible participants to optimise the value of this critically important initiative.”

The NBCSP has been progressively rolled out, from covering those aged 55 or 65 years in 2006 to screening every 2 years for all Australians aged 50–74 years by 2020. During 2016–17, 41% of people invited to participate in screening did so. A recent review of the NBCSP found that the risk of death from colorectal cancer was lower for invitees, and that those who had cancer were diagnosed at an earlier stage of disease. The BCCA is a Clinical Quality Registry funded by the Colorectal Surgical Society of Australia and New Zealand using data voluntarily entered by participating surgeons.

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