Catching Colorectal Cancer Early

After actor Chadwick Boseman's death, African Americans are reminded once again about the importance of being screened early.

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Chadwick Boseman was a masterful actor. He captured the essence of Jackie Robinson, James Brown and Thurgood Marshall and brought to life the transcendent fictional King T'Challa in Black Panther.

Tragically, Boseman, who died at age 43 after a four-year battle with colorectal cancer, also represented the increased risk the disease poses for Black people and those under age 50. African Americans are about 20% more likely to develop colorectal cancer and about 40% more likely to die from it. According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), "They often experience greater obstacles to cancer prevention, detection, treatment and survival, including systemic racial disparities that are complex and go beyond the obvious connection to cancer." Colorectal cancer has been rising in younger people regardless of background.

To improve diagnosis, in 2018, the ACS changed the recommended age for a first colorectal screening from 50 to 45. In October 2020, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force similarly advised reducing the age threshold to 45.

If finalized, the new recommendation will be particularly significant because Medicare and private insurance would be required to cover it with no co-pay or out-of-pocket costs.The task force did not specify screening methods but noted that both stool blood tests and direct examination (e.g., colonoscopy) reduce mortality.

To learn more, see "Colorectal Cancer Takes the Life of Far Too Many People and Black Men are Disproportionately Affected."

For more about colon cancer screening, click here.

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