Gay Men May Be Able to Self-Check for Anal Cancer

A recent study found that self- and partner exams were a fairly reliable way of identifying anal abnormalities that may be signs of cancer.

October 3, 2017

Men who have sex with men (MSM) are able to conduct exams of their own anus or that of their partner to detect abnormalities that may be signs of cancer, Reuters Health reports. With simple training, MSM can then possibly detect such abnormalities earlier, when the chance of successful treatment is higher.

The anal cancer rate is disproportionately high among MSM, in particular those living with HIV, although a recent study found that the rate for HIV-positive men has declined in recent years.

Publishing their findings in Sexually Transmitted Diseases, researchers in this new study recruited 200 MSM between ages 27 and 78, 60.5 percent of whom were HIV positive. The men had a median age of 52. A total of 42.5 percent were Black.

A clinician skilled in performing digital anorectal examinations (DARE, meaning the use of a finger to probe the anus) used a pelvic mannequin to show study participants how to conduct a self–anal examination or a partner anal examination.

Next the clinician performed a DARE on the men without immediately disclosing his own findings. Then the man or couple performed a self– or partner anal examination, respectively.

The clinician detected anal abnormalities in 12 men, nine of which the men detected through self– or partner anal exams, meaning that 75 percent of those with an abnormality were able to detect it on their own. Ninety-three percent of the men classified the health of their anal canal correctly. Ninety-four percent of those without an anal abnormality correctly diagnosed themselves in this category.

A total of 60.5 percent of the men said they had never before checked their anus for an abnormality, but after the study, 93 percent said they would conduct a self- or partner exam in the future.

The study authors say clinicians should encourage their patients to conduct such exams and

report any abnormalities.

To read the Reuters Health article, click here (free registration with the web site Medscape site is required).

To read the study abstract, click here.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.