

Patient journey: Bowel Cancer screening and detection.



Ms. BJ is a healthy 46-year-old woman who follows a balanced diet, doesn't smoke, and occasionally enjoys a glass of wine with dinner. She has no gastrointestinal symptoms or visible rectal bleeding but has a family history of bowel cancer.

Screening

Ms. BJ received her National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) faecal occult blood test (FOBT) in the mail. This test checks for hidden blood in your stool (poop).

Ms BJ mailed her sample to the laboratory as outlined in the information she received in the mail, and two weeks later, her General Practitioner (GP) contacted her with the results.

Test results

Ms. BJ's results were positive for blood in her stool. Her GP referred her to a Gastroenterologist, which is me.

Further testing with a Gastroenterologist

During our consultation, I quickly arranged a colonoscopy to investigate further. During the procedure, I found a 5 cm lesion in her left colon. I took a biopsy, applied a marker (tattoo) to the area, and sent the sample for urgent analysis.

Diagnosis and referral to a Colorectal surgeon

The biopsy confirmed that Ms. BJ had colorectal cancer. I referred her to a colorectal surgeon for further treatment.

Alternate test outcome & Future screening

If Ms. BJ's NBCSP test had been negative, she would still need to follow up with an FOBT every 2 years and a colonoscopy every 5 years due to her family history.

Recognising bowel cancer symptoms

- Changes in bowel habits
- Weight loss
- Abdominal pain or discomfort
- Rectal bleeding
- Feeling of a lump or incomplete bowel movement
- Tiredness and fatigue (can indicate iron deficiency anemia)
- No symptoms in the early stages

Risk factors for bowel cancer

- Age: Common in those over 45
- Family history of bowel cancer
- Diet low in fiber and high in fat, particularly processed meat
- Lack of exercise
- Obesity
- Smoking
- Alcohol consumption
- Certain conditions like inflammatory bowel disease

Importance of early diagnosis

Early diagnosis can save lives. If bowel cancer is detected early, treatment is often more successful, and survival rates improve significantly. Over 90% of bowel cancer cases can be treated successfully if found early.

NBCSP expands age for screening

Previously, only people aged 50-74 could get a bowel cancer test kit.

From July 1, 2024, the program extends to those aged 45-74. National screening has greatly improved survival rates, making it crucial to participate in the screening and consult your GP if you notice any symptoms.

For more information, visit the [National Bowel Cancer Screening Program website](#).

This information, dated June 2024, has been compiled in collaboration with Dr. Anny Rizvi, a gastroenterologist at Knox Private Hospital.



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