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Improving colorectal cancer screening rates in a managed care health plan: recruitment of provider organizations for a randomized effectiveness trial.

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Evidence-based guidelines recommend regular colorectal cancer (CRC) screening for adults 50 years and older, yet screening rates remain very low. In this paper we describe the challenges associated with recruitment and retention of provider organizations (POs) for a group randomized, controlled effectiveness trial to increase CRC screening, among patients in a managed care health insurance plan. Using the health plan as the sampling frame, we recruited POs to test a facilitated quality improvement program to increase CRC screening. Defined eligibility and recruitment procedures were used as part of this process. We successfully recruited 36 POs over the course of 9 months; however, there were many challenges associated with the recruitment and retention process, including difficulties in (a) identifying the PO medical director and the individual authorized to agree to study participation, (b) making contact with the medical director, and (c) obtaining the materials necessary to initiate the study. All of these factors delayed the research substantially. Retention activities were also a major challenge in that one-third of the medical directors changed during the course of the intervention. This study benefited from a strong partnership between the health plan and the research group. Although many challenges exist, there are tremendous opportunities that result from the design and conduct of effectiveness research in existing POs. Successful implementation of programs that are feasible and take advantage of existing quality improvement mechanisms within the PO has potential to improve CRC screening rates and can have a major public health impact.

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