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Individuals with an increased risk of colorectal cancer: perceived benefits and psychological aspects of surveillance by means of regular colonoscopies.

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PURPOSE: To evaluate the psychological consequences of genetic counseling followed by a surveillance program using colonoscopy among individuals with increased risk of colorectal cancer. **PATIENTS AND METHODS:** Two hundred sixty-five individuals, participating in a surveillance program with colonoscopy, were mailed a survey questionnaire that assessed their experience of the surveillance program and their perception of the risk of colorectal cancer. The Hospital Anxiety and Depression scale and the Swedish Short Form-36 Health Survey was also included. **RESULTS:** Two hundred forty individuals completed the questionnaire and were divided into the following risk groups: risk group 1, an individual with a mutation in hMLH1 or hMSH2 and a lifetime colorectal cancer risk of 80% (n = 28); risk group 2, a lifetime colorectal cancer risk of 40% (n = 129); and risk group 3, a lifetime colorectal cancer risk of 20% (n = 83). Among all individuals, the mean for perceived benefit was 8.0, and the perception of discomfort was 3.3 on the visual analog scale (1-10). In risk group 1, 61% underestimated personal risks as being 40% or less. Approximately 50% of the subjects in risk groups 2 and 3 either under- or overestimated their lifetime risk. According to the Swedish Short Form-36 Health Survey and the Hospital Anxiety and Depression scale, the study sample resembled the reference population. **CONCLUSION:** A majority of the study sample understood why they were under surveillance, and regular colonoscopies were well tolerated. The wide range of risk perception as well as low-risk perception in mutation positive subjects is acceptable, as long as these individuals adhere to surveillance programs and do not demonstrate increased levels of anxiety or depression.