

Knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral intentions in relation to the early detection of colorectal cancer in the United Kingdom.

McCaffery K, Wardle J, Waller J.

Health Behaviour Unit, Cancer Research UK, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Royal Free and University College Medical School, England, London, UK

Colorectal cancer (CRC) mortality is high. Understanding the social, psychological, and cognitive predictors of early detection practices such as screening may help improve CRC outcomes. This study examined knowledge of CRC and the relationship between knowledge, attitudes to cancer, and intentions to engage in early detection behaviors for CRC in a national representative population sample. An interview-based survey was carried out in a British population sample of adults ages 16 to 74 years ($n = 1637$), assessing knowledge, attitudes, and intention with regard to colorectal cancer. Knowledge levels were very low; 58% ($n = 995$) of respondents could not list any colorectal cancer risk factors and 24% ($n = 393$) were unable to identify any warning signs for cancer. Knowledge was lower among men ($\chi^2(2) = 52.8, P < 0.0001$), younger respondents ($\chi^2(10) = 79.9, P < 0.0001$), and those with less education ($\chi^2(4) = 73.9, P < 0.0001$). Attitudes to cancer were more negative among women ($\chi^2(2) = 7.4, P = 0.025$), younger participants ($\chi^2(10) = 22.4, P = 0.013$), and those with less education ($\chi^2(4) = 75.0, P < 0.0001$). Low knowledge was associated with negative attitudes ($P < 0.0001$) and both factors were associated with lower intentions to participate in colorectal cancer screening ($P < 0.0001$). Multivariate analysis indicated that attitudes partially mediated the effect of knowledge on screening intentions. Increasing knowledge may reduce negative public perceptions of cancer which may impact positively on intentions to participate in screening.

PMID: 12689797 [PubMed - in process]