



Health Care Forum

ASK THE MEDICAL EXPERTS

A New Virtual Reality: Inside the Colon

In the United States, over 150,000 new cases of colorectal cancer are diagnosed every year. From that number, Colon Cancer deaths top nearly 55,000 men and women. Early detection can prevent up to 80% of these deaths. According to the American Cancer Society, patients over the age of 50 or patients with an increased risk of colon cancer should be screened for colon cancer every 3-5 years.

So why is the compliance rate for traditional colonoscopy so low? Is it the preparation required? The time commitment? The risks? Whatever the reason, Windsong Radiology Group decided to take action and pursue advances in colon imaging to improve those statistics. According to Thomas Summers, M.D., a Radiologist at Windsong, "recent research has shown virtual colonoscopy to be very accurate. We've been working with a number of local referring physicians to prove just that - already with excellent feedback."

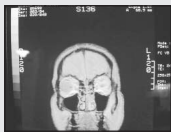
With conventional colonoscopy, the patient receives a cleansing preparation 24 hours prior to the exam. The patient is then sedated while the physician inserts a long, flexible, lighted tube into the rectum and slowly guides it through the colon. Comparatively, virtual colonoscopy is a recently developed, minimally invasive technique for detecting polyps and colon cancer at its earliest stages. It utilizes a high resolution CT scanner and virtual reality software to look inside the body. "Once the brief CT scan is completed, the

computer recreates a realistic 3 dimensional image of the inside of the patient's colon, allowing our radiologists to move along the inside of the colon looking for disease," says Dr. Summers. "Although a preparation is still required, it is a milder preparation which is preferred by most patients compared to conventional colonoscopy preparations."

The object of either method of colonoscopy is to find very small polyps, which once removed, will never become cancerous. Virtual colonoscopy takes about half the time as compared to conventional colonoscopy. It is also more comfortable. As a result, no sedation is needed; patients can return to their usual activities or go home after the procedure without the aid of another person. Unlike conventional colonoscopy, the radiologist cannot take tissue samples or remove polyps during virtual colonoscopy. If needed, patients may still need to be referred for that procedure.

Although some insurances including Medicare do not currently provide coverage, most patients are willing to pay out of pocket for the peace of mind provided by a normal virtual colonoscopy exam. Windsong has taken the extra step to contact local insurance carriers to press for coverage because of the accuracy and benefits of virtual colonoscopy. Dr. Summers adds, "in the long run, what's good for the patients is what matters, and we believe it's the right thing to do."

By: Thomas Summers, M.D.



Imaging Experts

How does Virtual Colonoscopy work?

Virtual Colonoscopy is a dedicated colonic CT scan performed after bowel cleansing and gentle air insufflation of the colon. The CT scan images are obtained and reviewed by a radiologist. It does not involve sedation or a scope being guided through the colon as does conventional optical colonoscopy.

What should patients expect during their visit to Windsong Radiology Group?

The patient is directed to our private CT scan suite where a technologist will place a very small tube into the rectum. Carbon dioxide gas is gently insufflated into the colon distending the colon. Two brief CT scan images are obtained, each of which take approximately 20 seconds to acquire. The patient is then able to go home and the images are processed and reviewed by our radiologists. Reports of the findings are then sent to the referring physician.

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Additional questions may be
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