

It's National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, and Dr. Keith Berger wants you to know that getting screened for colon cancer by way of colonoscopy isn't as bad as you think.

"First of all, we've got great drugs," said Berger, which render the search for precancerous growths with the aid of a 5-foot-long tube no big deal for most people.

Berger, a gastroenterologist in his 28th year of practice, opened The Center for Health and Cancer Prevention on First Colonial Road in 2001 to focus exclusively on performing and improving colonoscopy procedures.

Generally, people have become less self-conscious about their bodies, he said. For patients who are uncomfortable, Berger tries to put them at ease, assuring them that it's "just another day in the life of Keith Berger."

Fifty is the age at which it's recommended the average person get screened for colon cancer. For people at higher risk, due to personal or family history of cancer or other risk factors, earlier and more frequent screening may be recommended.

Berger said early diagnosis of colon cancer makes a difference. For those who have put off their colonoscopy, he said, "Just do it. You'll have peace of mind and it'll be done."

How will your office observe

National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month? We will try to talk as many people into a colonoscopy as possible.

Which is the highest risk factor for

colon cancer? Just living in the USA, and high body weight – all "developed" Western societies have about the same rate of colon cancer. Probably the food we eat (too much quantity, too much meat/fat/calories). Smoking is now also a risk factor.

Are women or men at higher risk,

and why? Both equal, although women live longer so yearly incidence (is) a bit less.

What is the most frequent excuse you've heard from people who have delayed cancer screening?



BILL TIERNAN | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

Keith E. Berger

Doctor's prescription for colon cancer screening is to 'Just do it' during Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

INTERVIEW BY VICTORIA BOURNE | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

"Doc, I just haven't gotten around to it yet."

What are some misconceptions about colonoscopy? It's difficult (only the laxative and diet the day before get bad reviews). Colonoscopy is more cost effective and effective at preventing colon cancer than any other screening modality. It is the single most effective prevention tool we have against any cancer.

What innovations do you provide patients? State of the art sedation. We use a relatively new, extremely safe but rapid acting anesthetic – no discomfort, wake up much faster and almost no side effects.

Our office is exclusively dedicated to colon cancer screening. So our procedures are very efficient in terms of the patient's time and we are easy to reach and schedule with. I have personally done over 45,000 procedures with an extraordinarily good safety record and my exams are usually less than 15 minutes. We are the only practice with a certified nurse anesthetist on every case for added safety and comfort.

What do you enjoy most about being a solo practitioner? I love being the "captain" of the ship. I can make innovations and take the practice wherever I want. I am free to create a great and

enjoyable work environment, and see "how good can it get?"

Describe your staff in two words
Awe-Some

Describe your bedside manner
Great listener

The person you admire most and why John F. Kennedy because of his boldness, courage and vision

Childhood ambition To be a great inventor and to be famous

Favorite hangout Lowe's or The Home Depot. I like Woodcraft, too.

A movie you've seen recently that you'd recommend to a friend "Pride and Prejudice" (the PBS series with Colin Firth)

Your nightstand books "An

Bio

Full name Keith Edward Berger MD

Neighborhood Lynncres

Age 58

Nickname Some of my patients call me 'Doc'

Marital status Married to Deshawna for 14 years

Children Lauren (29), Jill (25), Evan (22), Briana (19), Gena (12), Kalin (10)

Pets Callie (stubborn little Westie), Jasmine (pedigree cat), Socks (mutt cat), two rabbits, one hamster, one snake

Occupation Physician

Education Granby High School, Harvard University, Duke Medical School/residency, Yale University (fellowship)

Community service Virginia Beach Health Clinic

Church affiliation Ohef Shalom Temple (Norfolk)

Hobbies Computers, woodworking, photography, leading seminars/coaching people on how to have life be extraordinary, watching great movies in my home theater

Unfinished Life"; "John Adams"; any Kurt Vonnegut book

If you could choose your theme song, what would it be? The Beatles, "In My Life." (close second, "Imagine" by John Lennon)

Favorite sports and/or sports team ACC basketball, UNC Tar Heels (despite my Blue Devil loyalties, Dean Smith was my hero)

What is your personal motto? A quote by Wayne Gretzky, "You'll miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take."

Which Web sites would you recommend to learn more about colorectal cancers? American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org), American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (www.asge.org) or just call my office.

What can young people do now to reduce their risk of colon cancer? Don't smoke, quit if you already do; keep your calories and weight down, get in the habit of working out and keep it the rest of your life.