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Pilot Project in Conroe Almost Doubles Colon Cancer Screening

Lone Star Family Health Center Manages Successful Project Funded by Wal-Mart

CONROE, Texas —Jan. 24, 2011— Today, Lone Star Family Health Center of Conroe was recognized for nearly doubling colon cancer screening rates since last year. The Lone Star facility implemented evidence-based strategies to achieve this success in a pilot project funded by Wal-Mart and supported by the American Cancer Society, Texas Medical Association’s Physician Oncology Education Program, and the Texas Association of Community Health Centers.

“Since colon cancer is preventable, screening is a life-saving effort that we consider a priority,” said Dr. Stephen L. McKernan, chief executive officer for Lone Star Family Health Center. “We feel the significant results of our project will be an incentive for other community health centers to also implement strategies to increase colon cancer screening rates.”

The Texas Association of Community Health Centers (TACHC) assisted with the planning of Lone Star’s colon cancer screening project. “We will be discussing this Conroe model with the sixty-seven other community health centers in Texas and encouraging them to adopt similar practices and guidelines,” said José Camacho, executive director for TACHC.

Colon cancer is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer and the third leading cause of cancer death in both men and women. Screening is recommended for anyone age 50 and older, but only half of the U.S. population age 50 and older has been tested. Removal of

precancerous polyps and detection of early cancers have caused a rapid decline in colon cancer death rates in recent years. When detected early, colon cancer is more than 90 percent curable. Despite this, screening has long been difficult to get patients to complete. The primary reason patients say they are not screened is because a doctor did not advise it.

Data from the Lone Star Family Health Center's project in 2011 resulted in almost twice as many patients screened for colon cancer compared to 2010. In 2010, the center documented 93 colorectal screening tests versus 174 for 2011. The center serves approximately 2500 patients ages 50 and older.

"The American Cancer Society recognized the Lone Star Family Health Center today for their significant increase in colon cancer screening rates and for providing a standard of primary care excellence," said Dr. Lewis Foxhall, chair of the American Cancer Society's national Primary Care Advisory Group.

As part of the pilot project, Lone Star physicians and staff used the American Cancer Society's "How to Increase Preventative Screening Rates in Practice" guide and mapped out a plan of implementation for colon cancer screening. The guide includes detailed instructions on stressing the importance of screening to patients when recommending testing, developing a policy for the health care team to follow, measuring progress, and following up with reminders. To access "How to Increase Preventative Screening Rates in Practice", visit cancer.org/colonmd.

Currently, Medicare covers colon cancer screening with no out-of-pocket cost. Most private insurance plans are now required to cover colon cancer screening, but pre-approval from the insurance provider is recommended.

The American Cancer Society received a grant from the Wal-Mart Foundation that dedicates \$30,000 each to 30 communities nationwide for health outreach programs. The Conroe/Lone Star Family Health Center project is one of two efforts in Texas to be funded by this grant.

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