

# Crusader for colorectal cancer screenings



## Medical assistant supports efforts to improve screening rates

By Cathy Cassata

Every day that Polly Bickett, CMA (AAMA), shows up to work at Queen City Medical Group in Ohio, she makes it her mission to inform patients about the importance of colorectal cancer screenings.

“In primary care, everything starts with us [medical assistants],” says Bickett. “The patients are more comfortable with us because they see us every few months or when they’re sick. We have the best opportunity to address preventive issues at every single visit.”

Her focus—as well as her workplace’s focus—on colorectal cancer screenings is part of the American Association of Medical Assistants® partnership with the National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable (NCCRT) and its campaign to increase colorectal cancer screening rates.

Three years before Bickett started working with Queen City Medical Group in 2012, Ohio launched its first patient-centered medical home (PCMH), a care delivery model in which patient treatment is coordinated through a primary care provider. Using this model, Queen City Medical Group focuses on encouraging patients to be proactive in their overall care and wellness and take preventive health measures, such as staying up to date on vaccinations, mammograms, and colorectal cancer screenings.

“Preventive care sometimes falls to the wayside because, when patients come

in sick, we’re focused on what’s wrong with them [at that time],” says Bickett. “To be part of the PCMH, we have to meet NCQA [National Committee for Quality Assurance] standards, and we noticed that our lowest scores were for colorectal cancer screenings.”

This discovery motivated the practice to increase screenings among its patients.

“In the beginning, [this initiative] was difficult,” says Bickett. “A lot of us in the office are under 50, so it was hard to connect with the patients. We didn’t have the education on colonoscopies. We needed to educate ourselves so we could educate the patient.”

The practice arranged for a gastroenterologist to speak to medical assistants about the preparation for a colonoscopy and what happens during the procedure. Additionally, a representative for Cologuard, a noninvasive colon cancer screening test, visited to talk about colorectal cancer screenings.

“When we were rooming patients and asking questions, we found out that the main barrier to [patients] getting colonoscopies is that they don’t want to go through the preparation of drinking so much liquid,” says Bickett. “That’s when we gave them the option of [using] Cologuard [first] and explained that if [the test] came back positive, then a colonoscopy would be necessary. Our scores went up dramatically just from them understanding this.”

Now, the group works with TriHealth Digestive Institute to ensure that patients are getting colonoscopies. TriHealth Digestive Institute informs Queen City Medical Group when a patient does not return a call for the procedure. “We then call the patient and say, ‘We spoke with TriHealth Digestive, and you are due for your colonoscopy. How can we help put your mind at ease?’” says Bickett.

As long as Bickett has been with Queen City Medical Group, she continues to gain more responsibilities. Today, she is the office operations coordinator, which involves filling in for staff when they are out, as well as attending workshops and seminars to learn about enhancements and software and then training staff so they are up to par.

“I enjoy learning new things,” Bickett says. “TriHealth is always evolving and coming up with new initiatives and ways to improve, and we [at Queen City Medical Group] are often the first ambulatory office within TriHealth that gets to pilot everything.”

When it comes to preventive care, Bickett embraces every opportunity to learn more and share her knowledge with colleagues: “When medical assistants are educated about preventive wellness, such as colorectal cancer screenings, then we know the importance of these tests will be communicated to patients.” ♦