

A Lifesaving LESSON

Ask anyone to name their least favorite medical procedure, and you will likely hear: “Colonoscopy.”

Linda Foster certainly felt that way. Put off by the preparation process, she avoided having the important screening until age 73. That’s a good 20 years past the age recommended for a first colonoscopy.

Ms. Foster’s moment of truth arrived when she accompanied her husband, Donny, to a doctor’s appointment to schedule his colonoscopy. “He told Dr. Whitehead that I’d never had one,” she says. “I later told Donny, ‘Thanks for throwing me under the bus!’ But by doing that, he actually saved my life.”

Without delay, David C. Whitehead, M.D., MPH, scheduled her colonoscopy for the following Friday. A board-certified gastroenterologist and hepatologist at Southeast Georgia Physician Associates—Gastroenterology, Dr. Whitehead is also vice chief of the Health System’s Brunswick Campus Department of Medicine.

The shocking truth

It’s a good thing Dr. Whitehead convinced Ms. Foster to have a colonoscopy — the procedure

revealed a large cancerous growth in her colon, even though she had only experienced pain for about three months.

Dr. Whitehead gave the news to Ms. Foster after she awakened from anesthesia. “I felt complete shock and devastation,” she says.

The only symptom Ms. Foster had experienced before her colonoscopy was stomach pain after eating. Considering the size of her tumor, Dr. Whitehead told Ms. Foster it would have taken three years for her cancer to grow that large.

“I’ve always heard colon cancer is a silent killer, and now I believe it,” says Mr. Foster.

“Please don’t hesitate to have a colonoscopy. It could very well save your life.”

— Linda Foster,
a colon cancer survivor

A decisive moment

Things moved fast after the diagnosis. Dr. Whitehead immediately assembled a health care team that included medical oncologist Antonio Moran Jr., M.D., FACP, Southeast Georgia

Physician Associates—Hematology & Oncology, and general surgeon Stephen F. Kitchen, M.D., FACS, a board-certified private practice surgeon.

“We received a call from Dr. Kitchen on Sunday morning telling us the surgery was scheduled for Monday morning,” says Ms. Foster. “He said, ‘Pack your bag, and go there today.’”

Dr. Kitchen arrived shortly after she settled into her hospital room. “He spent at least 30 minutes with us, reviewing the procedure. He was so thorough,” she says.

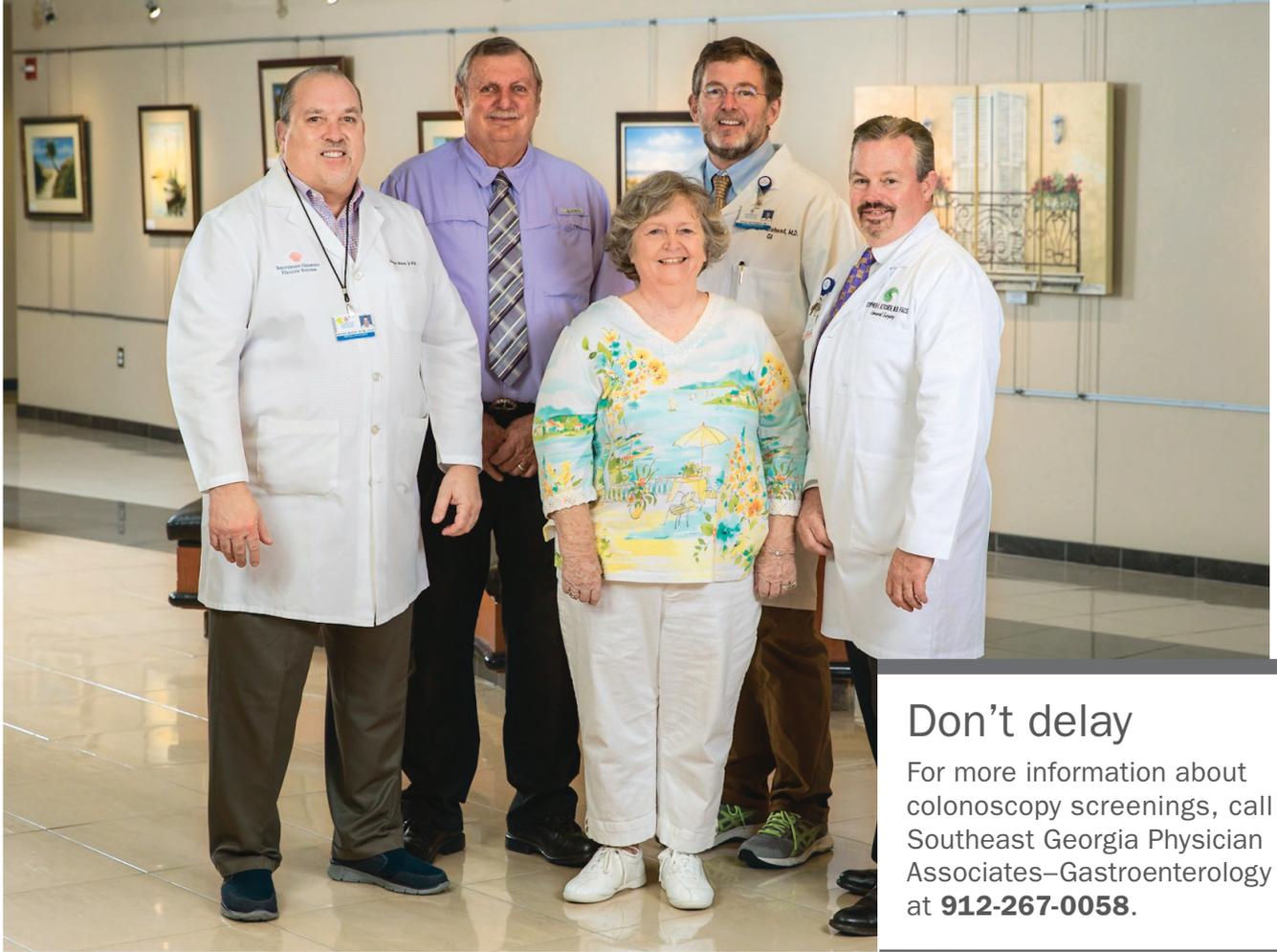
Proactive Steps to Prevent Colon Cancer

Colon cancer is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in the U.S. for men and women, but it’s also one of the most preventable forms of the disease. Protect yourself and your loved ones by reviewing these risk factors and prevention tips:



Risk factors

- A family history of the disease or polyps
- A personal history of IBD (inflammatory bowel disease)
- Type 2 diabetes
- Obesity
- Smoking
- A diet high in red meat, processed meats and fried foods
- Heavy alcohol consumption
- Lack of exercise
- Being 50 or older
- Ethnicity: African Americans and Ashkenazi Jews have a higher risk



Don't delay

For more information about colonoscopy screenings, call Southeast Georgia Physician Associates—Gastroenterology at **912-267-0058**.

A second chance

By Monday evening, Ms. Foster's surgery was complete. Dr. Moran visited her in the hospital, ordering tests to confirm her cancer was thoroughly removed. Dr. Whitehead also checked in on her.

"I couldn't have asked for better physicians and nurses. I'm very comfortable with my doctors and my hospital," she says. "These three doctors are my 'dream team,' and I would never consider using anyone else."

Mr. Foster concurs: "They showed a phenomenal level of professionalism. They are the best of the best. There's no point to go anywhere else."

He so appreciated his wife's care that he delivered a cake to the doctors and nurses afterward. It's easy to understand their gratitude. Thanks to her health care team, Ms. Foster is now cancer-free.

"You don't realize how fragile life is until they say, 'You've got cancer,'" she says. "I have a whole new outlook on life. Believe me, I'll be back in a year for another colonoscopy."

Asked what advice she would offer others dreading the procedure, Ms. Foster replies: "Please don't hesitate to have a colonoscopy. It could very well save your life."

Prevention Tips



Maintain a healthy weight.



Stay physically active.



Don't smoke.



Eat healthy, such as more fruits and vegetables and less red meat or processed meats.



Avoid alcohol, or drink in moderation.



Get colonoscopy screenings at doctor-recommended intervals.