

**The Canadian Association of Gastroenterology (CAG) and the  
Canadian Digestive Health Foundation (CDHF)  
Annual Scientific Conference:  
Canadian Digestive Diseases Week (CDDW)  
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*Is Patient Gender Associated with the First Evaluation of the Colon?*

Large bowel tests are used for diagnosis and for colorectal cancer screening. Ontario women sometimes receive a different first large bowel test when compared with men, according to a study released on February 27, 2004 at Canadian Digestive Diseases Week (CDDW) in Banff, Alberta.

Women were more likely to receive a barium enema as a first test, 29 per cent when compared with men at 24 per cent. Women were less likely to have a fecal occult blood test, 42 per cent, versus 45 per cent for men. The abstract is entitled *Is Patient Gender Associated with the First Evaluation of the Colon?*

A colonoscopy is considered the gold standard in colonic evaluation tests but is expensive and resource intensive. The barium enema (BE) is an x-ray of the bowel, which is not as accurate but less expensive and more readily available.

“There is a difference in testing based on gender, and we don’t know why,” said Dr. Linda Rabeneck (Head, Division of Gastroenterology, Sunnybrook & Women’s College Health Sciences Centre). “It’s quite striking that gender plays a role in the type of test a person gets.

“Are there women’s preferences to testing, or is it what their physicians are advising them to have? We need to know more about this.”

The study also demonstrated that people were more likely to be sent for FOBT testing if their primary care physician was female, if they lived in an urban setting and if they had received a physical exam in the year prior.

The study followed 1,657,097 residents of Ontario aged 50-70 for a five-year period starting Jan. 1, 1997 to determine when they had their first colonic investigation.

It also revealed that only 20 per cent of the study group received a colonic investigation. Earlier this month the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology recommended that all Canadians 50 and over be screened for colon cancer. It is the third most prevalent cancer, with 20,000 new cases diagnosed in Canada each year. Greater than one-third of those affected die from this preventable disease.

“It’s striking that only 20 per cent had a test for any reason. It’s stunning when you consider how important screening is. We need to boost the amount of testing overall,” Dr. Rabeneck said, “then we need to sort out if the barium enema is a woman’s choice or if there’s some other reason.”

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