

Lung Cancer Screening Options Grow

Expanded insurance coverage gives high-risk patients access to an important tool for early detection

NOVEMBER 12, 2014

DENVER, CO — Insurance coverage of CT screening for lung cancer is expanding, with changes coming to both private insurance and Medicare. Beginning January 1, 2015, private insurance will cover low-dose CT screening for lung cancer in high-risk individuals, as mandated by the Affordable Care Act. In November, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services released a proposal to cover CT screening for lung cancer. Medicare coverage could begin in mid-2015.

Lung cancer is the number one cancer killer of men and women in the United States. The most promising strategy for improving lung cancer survival rates is early detection through low-dose CT screening. Self-pay patients now pay about \$200 to \$400 for a lung cancer screening CT.

The change in private insurance coverage and the proposed Medicare coverage affect those at high risk of developing lung cancer: people 55 or older, with at least 30 pack-years smoking history (a pack a day for 30 years), who are still smoking or have quit within the past 15 years.

“If we can catch lung cancer in its earliest stages, we can significantly improve cure rates. Studies have shown the best method for early detection is through low-dose chest CT,” said Debra Dyer, director, National Jewish Health Lung Cancer Screening CT Program. “Coverage of lung cancer screenings is a crucial step in our fight to reduce lung cancer deaths.”

In 2011 the National Lung Cancer Screening Trial (NLST) reported a 20 percent reduction in lung cancer mortality among heavy smokers who received annual low-dose chest CT screenings. The main reason for the reduced mortality occurred because more cancers were detected at early stages when they are still localized to the lung and can be successfully treated.

The National Jewish Health Lung Cancer Screening Program is recognized for excellence by both the American College of Radiology and the Lung Cancer Alliance.

National Jewish Health is the leading respiratory hospital in the nation. Founded 123 years ago as a nonprofit hospital, National Jewish Health today is the only facility in the world dedicated exclusively to groundbreaking medical research and treatment of patients with respiratory, cardiac, immune and related disorders. Patients and families come to National Jewish Health from around the world to receive cutting-edge, comprehensive, coordinated care. To learn more, visit the media resources page.

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