

Faulty bowel cancer screening test kits – Cancer Council puts it in perspective

Bowel cancer kills more than 4000 Australians every year, yet nearly all cases can be cured if found early. Cancer Council Australia strongly supports the national Bowel Cancer Screening Program and is campaigning for its expansion to cover all Australians 50 and over.

Recently, it has been reported that “thousands of people” who completed faulty bowel testing kits through the program could face a delayed cancer diagnosis. Based on evidence, of the 4890 people who returned a positive test using replacement kits, only a small number are expected to go on to be diagnosed with cancers, most of which will be cured if found early.

To put it in perspective, a positive FOBT result rarely means you have cancer. It means there are signs that should be investigated, usually through colonoscopy. Of the 7000 Australians who had colonoscopies after returning a positive FOBT test through the program, only 63 had a confirmed cancer and 239 a suspected cancer.

Early detection is the key to saving lives and reducing disease. Bowel cancer is usually easy to treat when detected early. The current FOBT screening program identifies double the number of bowel cancers at the most curable stage, compared with cancers found after reporting of symptoms.

Encouraging more Australians who are eligible to do the test and expanding the current screening program to screen everyone over the age of 50 every two years (currently the test is only available on a one-off basis to 50, 55 and 65 year-olds), has the potential to save 30 lives a week.

To support our campaign visit www.getbehindbowelscreening.com.au

If you have questions about bowel cancer or bowel cancer screening call Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 (local call cost anywhere in Australia).