March has been dedicated for National Colon Cancer Awareness Month as colon cancer is the third most common cancer in the United States and the second leading cause of cancer death. Each year, approximately 140,000 Americans are diagnosed with colorectal cancer, and more than 50,000 people will not live after treatment. Death can be avoided as this disease is highly preventable, but proper screening is important. Over 90 percent of cases occur in people aged 50 or older although it does affect people in all racial and ethnic groups. It is estimated that approximately 40,000 lives a year could be saved through regular colorectal cancer screenings and early treatment in men and women.

People that are 50 to 75 years old, should be screened for colorectal cancer regularly as screening tests help prevent colorectal cancer by detecting precancerous polyps early so they can be surgically removed and before they turn malignant. If everyone age 50 and older were screened regularly, 6 out of 10 deaths from colorectal cancer could be prevented from early detection.

Colorectal cancer is often called a silent disease, as most individuals do not report any symptoms. However, when symptoms do occur they may include the following:

- Bright red or very dark blood in the stool
- Weight loss with no known explanation
- Discomfort or pain in the abdomen, such as frequent gas pains, bloating, and cramps
- Unexplained iron-deficiency anemia

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms especially if they have been ongoing for longer than two weeks, there are several current screening methods that you can discuss with your doctor. A noninvasive test that can be conducted annually is a fecal occult blood test can detect blood in the stool. A flexible sigmoidoscopy is a visual examination by a small scope (camera) to look inside the rectum and lower part of the colon and a colonoscopy is a visual examination of the entire colon.

Lastly, it is also important to remember prevention and to practice living a healthy lifestyle by consuming a diet low in fat and eating many portions of fruit and vegetables. Regular physical activity can also lower your risk of developing colorectal cancer. Making patient education and awareness a priority to increase early detection of colorectal cancer and its treatment at early stages is also an important facet. There is a direct link between early detection with treatment and decreased mortality for colorectal cancer.

If you are concerned about your risk of colorectal cancer or need to schedule a routine screening, please contact your PCM and schedule an appointment at 210-916-9900.

References:
https://healthfinder.gov/nho/MarchToolkit
http://www.cancer.org/
www.fascrs.org
http://www.cancer.net/
http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main
Tobacco Cessation Program

This live, in-person program is comprised of four classes, provided once a week for four weeks. Participants interested in receiving pharmaceutical cessation aids will meet one-on-one with a Provider. More information will be provided during the first Tobacco Cessation Class. Please call JBSA-FSH Army Health Promotion at 210.916.7646 for class schedules and to enroll.

Program Eligibility:

The Tobacco Cessation Program is open to all TRICARE beneficiaries.