



## Referral Pathways: What to Do When You Spot Red Flags

### 1) Immediate Referral to Gastroenterology for Colonoscopy

- Do not 'watch and wait.' Younger patients often experience diagnostic delays because their symptoms are attributed to hemorrhoids, stress, or diet.
- Document your rationale clearly, noting that symptoms meet the criteria for early-age-onset colorectal cancer evaluation.
- Communicate urgency using language such as 'urgent but non-emergency' in referral notes.
- Share clinical context with the specialist — include family history, symptom duration, and any prior test results.

### 2) Order Non-Invasive Tests While Awaiting Specialist Evaluation

- Order a FIT (Fecal Immunochemical Test) or Cologuard (stool DNA test) to maintain diagnostic momentum.
- If positive, notify both the patient and specialist immediately to expedite colonoscopy scheduling.
- If negative but symptoms persist, proceed with colonoscopic evaluation.
- Reinforce that stool-based tests are not diagnostic but help ensure no time is lost while waiting for specialty care.

### 3) Coordinate with Patient Navigators or Social Workers to Reduce Barriers

- Engage navigators or social workers early to assist with scheduling, insurance approvals, and education.
- Provide written instructions and expectations about bowel prep, sedation, and recovery to minimize anxiety.
- Refer uninsured or underinsured patients to local screening programs or nonprofit resources (Colon Cancer Coalition, Fight CRC, C4, etc.).
- Follow up after referral to confirm appointments and help address logistical barriers.

### When in Doubt: Act Early

Younger patients should never be told they are 'too young' for colorectal cancer. If symptoms are persistent or unexplained, err on the side of caution. Early referral and screening can mean the difference between a stage I diagnosis and a stage IV emergency. By following these pathways — immediate referral, interim testing, and active coordination — providers can help close the gap that too often delays diagnosis and save lives through timely intervention.