



High bowel cancer rates prompt call for more screening

REGIONAL Australians are being encouraged to screen more regularly for bowel cancer after a south-west Victorian study found elevated rates of the disease.

The eight-year study by Deakin Rural Health, in collaboration with the Warrnambool Clinical School and South West Healthcare, found rates of colorectal cancer in the Warrnambool region higher than the national average.

Director of Deakin Rural Health, Associate Professor Vin Versace, said the study results needed to be interpreted in the context of the relatively small numbers.

Nonetheless, Associate Professor Versace said the findings should encourage more people to participate in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program.

“When you are invited to screen via the mail out, you should take the opportunity,” he said.

“If you have any questions, or are concerned about your risk of developing bowel cancer between screenings, you should talk to your doctor.”

Colorectal cancer is the second most commonly diagnosed malignancy in both men and women in Australia.

The national screening program started in 2006 and has been progressively rolled out, with full implementation expected from 2019, when screening will be offered every two years to people aged over 50.

Associate Professor Versace said the screening program was monitored nationally, but outcomes from regional and rural settings were lacking.

The Deakin Rural Health study looked at people who had a colonoscopy at the Warrnambool Base Hospital following positive screening in the national program between January 2007 and December 2014.

There were 180 colonoscopies during the study period, with 43.9 per cent of patients aged over 60.

Associate Professor Versace said the study found

higher rates of colorectal cancer and adenomas relative to the national average.

“The national monitoring report in 2016 showed confirmed cancer rates of 0.8 per cent and suspected cancer awaiting confirmation in a further 2.1 per cent, compared to 4.4 per cent at the Warrnambool hospital,” he said.

“The local result was more closely aligned with the cancer rate of 4.3 per cent from 4,817 colonoscopies reported from a Queensland study during 2006-2010.”

Associate Professor Versace said higher positive rates in rural and regional settings could only be confirmed with ongoing investigation of the national screening program.

“Our study demonstrates the value of this type of research, and highlights the importance of allocating resources to regional and remote areas to ensure equitable access to the screening program,” he said.

The study has been published in the Australian Journal of Rural Health.