

March and the Power of Prevention: Understanding Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month – Charles Catania, MD, Medical Director of PentaHealth

Each March, the medical community recognizes Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month — a time dedicated to education, prevention, and early detection of one of the most common, yet highly preventable, cancers in the United States. At PentaHealth, we view this month as an opportunity to remind our patients that colorectal cancer screening saves lives and that prevention truly begins with awareness.

Colorectal cancer is currently the third most commonly diagnosed cancer among both men and women in the United States. Despite advances in treatment, it remains a leading cause of cancer-related deaths. What many people do not realize, however, is that colorectal cancer is often preventable and highly treatable when detected early. In fact, when caught in its earliest stages, survival rates can exceed 90 percent.

Most colorectal cancers develop slowly over time, often beginning as small, benign growths known as polyps in the colon or rectum. These polyps may not cause symptoms initially, which is why screening plays such a critical role. Through routine screening, providers can detect and remove polyps before they ever become cancerous. Even if cancer is detected, finding it early significantly improves treatment outcomes and survival.

Current national guidelines recommend that individuals at average risk for colorectal cancer begin screening at age 45. Screening options vary and may include colonoscopy, stool-based testing, or other imaging techniques, depending on individual health history and patient preference. A colonoscopy remains the gold standard because it allows for both detection and removal of polyps during the same procedure, often preventing cancer before it starts.

While screening beginning at age 45 is appropriate for many individuals, some people are at higher risk and may need earlier or more frequent screening. Those with a family history of colorectal cancer or colon polyps, a personal history of inflammatory bowel disease such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, certain inherited genetic conditions, obesity, smoking history, heavy alcohol use, or type 2 diabetes may face increased risk. Lifestyle factors also play a role, as diets high in processed or red meats and low physical activity have been associated with higher incidence rates.

Fortunately, there are meaningful steps individuals can take to protect their colon health. A balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, fiber, and whole grains can support digestive health and may reduce the risk of cancer. Maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, limiting alcohol consumption, and avoiding tobacco are all important preventive measures. Combined with appropriate screening, these lifestyle choices form a powerful defense against colorectal cancer.

Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month also serves as a reminder that education and conversation matter. Many people delay screening due to uncertainty, fear, or simply not realizing they are due. Talking openly with family members, friends, and coworkers about screening can encourage others to prioritize their health. Wearing blue during March, sharing educational

information, and supporting loved ones who are undergoing screening or treatment are all simple but meaningful ways to raise awareness and potentially save lives.

At PentaHealth, we are committed to helping our patients take proactive steps toward prevention and early detection. Our providers work closely with patients to determine the most appropriate screening strategy based on personal risk factors and health history. Whether you are due for your first screening, need follow-up testing, or want to discuss your risk, our team is here to guide you every step of the way.

If you are 45 or older — or if you have risk factors that may warrant earlier screening — March is the perfect time to take action. Colorectal cancer is one of the few cancers we can often prevent before it begins. Through awareness, screening, and healthy lifestyle choices, we can make a meaningful difference in reducing its impact on our community. PentaHealth is here to help you stay informed, stay healthy, and stay ahead of preventable disease.

Dr. Charles P. Catania is board-certified in family medicine and hospice medicine. He received his medical degree from the American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine, trained in England, and completed his residency at Underwood Memorial Hospital in Woodbury, New Jersey, where he was named Chief Resident in 2009 and served on the New Jersey Academy of Family Physicians Board of Directors as the Resident Delegate.

Dr. Catania has been in private practice since 2010 and is currently the medical director for PentaHealth, where he also serves on the board of directors. In addition, he serves on the Tandigm Physician Services Board of Directors. Over the course of his career, Dr. Catania has received multiple recognitions, including:

- *Top Doc* awards from *Main Line Today* and *Suburban Life* (multiple years)
- The *Top Quality Provider Award* from Independence Blue Cross
- The *UnitedHealthcare Hero Award*

His clinical interests include pediatrics, with an emphasis on genetics from his prior experience at The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. As well as minor dermatological procedures, diabetes, and adolescent medicine.

Deeply engaged in his community, Dr. Catania is excited to serve as part of the SEDLCO school physician staff and now at the West Chester Rehab Facility. He also coaches baseball and hockey, staying actively involved with local youth programs.

Dr. Catania treasures time with his wife, Kimberly, and their three children – Jack, Joseph, and Anthony. He takes pride in providing a personal and compassionate approach to patient care, extending that same dedication to his family and community.



Dr. Charles P. Catania