

Life-Saving Treatment Now Covered by Medicare

Jerry Moore has always been proactive when it comes to his health.

But when he signed up for a lung cancer study at Methodist Estabrook Cancer Center, he had no idea just how that proactive move would impact his life.

"I smoked for 38 years and I was always concerned about it," said Jerry, who quit the habit 15 years ago. "I took part in the study because there's no way of knowing you have it."

He began getting annual low-dose CT scans in 2007, and six years later doctors picked up their first signs of cancer.

"I had no pain, no shortness of breath, no signs at all," said Jerry.

That's often the case with early stage lung cancer. With no symptoms to speak of, most patients don't know they have it until it's too late. That's why lung cancer is the nation's number one cancer killer – more deadly than prostate, colon and breast cancer combined. The best chance for survival is catching it early with a low-dose CT scan.

"This is the best screening tool that we have," said Pat Meyers, MD, pulmonologist at Methodist Estabrook Cancer Center. "By the time it would show up on a regular chest x-ray it would be in the advanced stage."

"Lung cancer has an 80 to 90 percent survival rate if it's found early," said Deb Meyers, program manager of the Methodist Lung Thoracic Oncology Clinic.

Designated as a lung cancer screening center of excellence by the Lung Cancer Alliance, Methodist is one of only 250 such sites across the country and performs more than 400 screens each year.

Now, a recent decision by Medicare means more people will be eligible for full coverage of this life-saving lung screening. Those ages 55 to 77, the highest risk age group for lung cancer, can receive the scan at no cost.

"The Medicare decision signals a new day where lung cancer transitions from the number one cancer killer to a treatable, curable disease," said Deb Meyers. "This test will help us catch it early and save lives."

Medicare will cover 100 percent of the cost of the test for those who meet these requirements:

- 55-77 years of age
- Show no signs or symptoms of lung cancer
- Smoked tobacco for at least 30 pack-years (one pack year = smoking one pack per day for one year)
- Current smoker or one who has quit within the last 15 years
- Receives a written order for a low dose CT scan from their medical care provider after a shared decision-making appointment.

One of the largest randomized controlled clinical trials in National Cancer Institute's history showed that low dose CT screening could reduce lung cancer mortality rates by at least 20 percent; a significant improvement for a cancer that currently has a five year overall survival rate of only 17 percent. For those diagnosed late stage, survival rates are less than 4 percent.

Jerry considers himself one of the lucky ones. Today, he's cancer-free.

"It was stage one when they found it and they felt they got every bit of it," said Jerry, who had the upper lobe of his right lung removed with surgery and avoided radiation and chemotherapy. "There's no danger since they caught it so early."

As he continues his recovery, he hopes now that the screening is covered by Medicare, more people will sign up to receive the scan that saved his life, and could save so many more.

"I want to help get this word out so people will know about the suffering and death a program like this can save," said Jerry. "I would not have known about my cancer until it was too late and I think it's very, very important that anybody who can get this done do it. I am so grateful to



Methodist Hospital for having the program that saved my life."

"We have seen first-hand the benefits of low dose CT scans in the early detection of lung cancer," said Deb Meyers. "To now be able to provide this preventative measure to potentially save more lives from this disease – it's a landmark day for us."

Those at high risk for lung cancer are encouraged to get screened. For more information on the screening program at Methodist Estabrook Cancer Center call 402-354-5858 or visit www.bestcare.org/lungscreening.