



Could spouses of colorectal cancer patients possess higher risk of developing colorectal cancer?

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Dear Editor:

I read with interest the various articles published in the past 12 months focusing on colorectal cancer (CRC) screening [1, 2]. The authors identified various social, economical and even familial barriers towards adoption of screening. But perhaps, the awareness of the risks of developing CRC is equally important as well to drive human behaviours.

It is well known that some of the well-established risk factors in the pathogenesis of CRC included unhealthy lifestyles and dietary habits [3, 4]. As a result, the World Health Organization also recently recommended that processed meat be classified as a carcinogen in the development of CRC [5]. And with the majority of the colorectal cancer patients being in their late 60s to early 80s, it would be sensible to assume that part of their lifestyle and dietary habits would be shared by their spouses/partners, who are typically married or being together since their 20s or 30s.

Most of the attention on the spouses of CRC has been on the psychological and social aspects of taking care of a patient with CRC. The notion of spouses of CRC in the modern era being at increased risk of developing CRC is poorly explored. Over the past 3 years, our colorectal surgery unit, which managed between 250 and 300 CRC per year, has actually managed 5 couples with concurrent colorectal cancer or advanced adenoma. The youngest couple aged in their 50s had locally advanced rectal cancers, while another couple in their 70s had very early sigmoid cancer. There was one couple where the

husband had stage IV sigmoid colon cancer while the wife had an advanced sigmoid colon adenoma. Two other couples in their 60s and 70s also had concurrent CRCs. It is also uncertain how many more spouses of CRC could be harbouring CRC or polyps as they have not undergone colonoscopy.

We hope that by bringing up our observation, more work can be done in the community to ascertain if spouses of colorectal cancer patients do possess a higher risk of developing colonic adenoma and colorectal cancer. This could have huge implications in the formulation of screening guidelines and counselling of spouses of CRC patients going ahead.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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