

New screening guidelines issued for lung cancer

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, an independent panel of experts, has updated recommendations for lung cancer screening.

The new guidelines include ages 50 to 80 instead of the previous 55 to 80. The pack-year window for smokers has been lowered from 30 years to 20 years. A pack-year is defined as one year of smoking one pack a day. More than 90% of lung cancer cases are associated with smoking.

“We are living longer, and preventive care

makes a big difference in our health as we age. Our ability to cure lung cancer is greater when it is diagnosed early,” notes WWMG pulmonologist Dr. Niket Nathani.

“We are living longer, and preventative care makes a big difference...”

Screening is important because patients often feel well in the early stages of the disease and are not aware that they need treatment, he explains.

The test itself is a brief, low-radiation CT scan once a year.

“Our approach at WWMG is team-based, to ensure continuity of care. We pulmonary physicians work closely with the patient’s primary care provider and with our WWMG Imaging Center, including its group of radiologists. If the scan reveals lung cancer, we remain involved by coordinating care with the oncology and radiation teams at our cancer care partnerships in the community”.



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SPRING 2021



All hands on deck for COVID-19 vaccination

“What do you need, Stephanie?”

“I’d like to get my freezer here for the Pfizer, but it’s too heavy.”

The meeting ended at 8:30am. Within two hours, Dr. David Russian, CEO of WWMG, arrived in his truck, with DOO Joe Smecker and the 200-pound,

minus-80° freezer for Stephanie Abbott, Pharm D.

“When vaccines became available, we all wanted to be part of the solution for our community,” says Smecker. In late December, all WWMG primary care locations became designated vaccination sites. The vaccine team rotated to each, one day per week.

A medical assistant described “a celebration every five minutes” when a

dose was given. “Let’s do more” was the next step, Smecker remembers.

The program soon expanded to a centralized Monday-Friday location in Snohomish, at 629 Avenue D, Suite 1. By mid-April, WWMG had given more than 15,000 doses, 12,000 of them at the Snohomish site.

“When vaccines became available, we all wanted to be part of the solution for our community.”

Abbott, who wrote the protocol for the clinic, provides clinical support and answers patient questions on site. She works closely

with administrator Garran Ingersoll. “Job satisfaction is through the roof,” he says. “I am proud of our team’s flexibility.”

“We were building the airplane as it was flying,” says Abbott. “We came together to support each other and the community.”

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Featured Providers

Maiyen Tran Hawkins, DO

Gastroenterology

"I strive to maximize every patient visit by determining a collaborative, comprehensive plan of action. Through this effort, the patient will have the care that is most important to them."

Kristen Boyce, DPM

Podiatry

"I try to be considerate of a patient's time, be empathetic of the problem, and offer treatment options that allow them to resume their desired activity and lifestyle."

Jose Mata, MD

Snohomish Family Medicine

"It's your health, it's your choice. My responsibility is to provide accurate, relevant health information and help you apply it to make the health choices that are best for you."

Andy Kruse, ARNP

Marysville Family Medicine

"I feel that the best care is provided through a trusted partnership between the patient and provider. This partnership provides the best outcomes through personalized, comprehensive, and effective healthcare."

Christina Nelson, ARNP

Everett Family Medicine

"I believe in a collaborative partnership approach to healthcare. I strive to acknowledge and incorporate each patient's unique values, beliefs and cultural background when providing care."

Exceptional care and opportunities

For WWMG Chairman of the Board Josh Webb, ARNP, the largest independent medical group in the North Puget Sound region is a lot like any local small business.



"It's our business. When you deal with the business owner, you get a higher level of service, because it reflects on the owner. And because

we are provider-owned and run, we can deliver exceptional quality care at a competitive cost."

Personally, he notes opportunities for providers that might not be available otherwise. "It's somewhat unusual for nurse practitioners to be in leadership positions in medical specialty groups. I have been able to enjoy some amazing opportunities here."



"Here comes the sun"

"It's been a long, cold, lonely winter ... it seems like years since it's been here. Here comes the sun."

No, that was not written this year. You knew that. George Harrison. The Beatles. Abbey Road. 1969.

Still, it's all true for 2021, and we should get outside in the sun.

Because warmer, longer days are great for activities outdoors that boost not just our physical health, but also our mental well-being.

Exercise helps to make our moods less variable. It lowers levels of stress hormones while stimulating production of endorphins, our body's natural feel-good chemicals.

In this pandemic year, outdoor activities also give us more opportunities to socialize safely, following guidelines from public health officials.

"Socializing is important for our health, and we can do more of that now outside," says WWMG psychologist Lisa Adriance, PhD. "Let's be creative in fun and safe ways, maintaining distancing precautions. Let's play games, or go on picnics, or fly kites on the beach."

"It's especially important for children," she adds. "They are resilient, but being out of school is being away from friends, too. Socializing safely has enormous benefits for children."

"Little darling, the smiles returning to the faces Here comes the sun. And I say, it's alright."

(We know from his autobiography that when he wrote the song, George Harrison was in fact outdoors, in his friend Eric Clapton's garden.)



Leading the way with TeleHealth

Dr. Tom Richardson, WWMG cardiologist, remembers the exact dates from last spring. "On March 16th, I told our office manager that we had to transition to TeleHealth. I began on the 18th and had switched completely by the end of that week."

All WWMG care centers were using TeleHealth within less than two weeks of the start of quarantine.

"We were nimble in implementing it," remembers Kim Holstein, one of the

WWMG executives who worked with Dr. Richardson to launch the service. "Our providers stayed connected with their patients, and continued to accept new patients."

The first step was securing a platform that was compliant with HIPAA requirements for keeping patient data safe. Backup software was set up, too.

Most of the challenges early on were technology barriers. Support staff received training on how to troubleshoot

with patients before the provider joined the call.

WWMG TeleHealth services have remained popular after the return of in-person visits.

"We are getting great feedback from our care centers and our patients, especially patients who work full-time or have long commutes," says Holstein. "Our patients on Whidbey Island love it," notes Dr. Richardson.

An early crucial priority

Seahawks 12s will get Joe Smecker's analogy right away. "Testing is a key part of the offensive and defensive strategies against COVID-19."



A testing program was WWMG's initial step to combat the spread of the virus, and to help keep patients and staff safe, recalls Smecker, Director of Operations.

Stephanie Abbott, PharmD, wrote the protocol for the program. "That's the clinical plan. It defines the patient population, identifies guidelines for participation, and specifies how data will be used."

"We worked with our lab partners and other

labs to reduce turnaround time for results as much as possible," adds Smecker.

Testing is now offered at all WWMG primary care sites, and is available to anyone. Lake Serene and Snohomish have walk-in components. Marysville and Lake Serene are designated for pre-procedure COVID-19 testing. "It has become best practice to incorporate the test in pre-procedure checklists," Smecker points out.

"It's rewarding how an independent group of independent practices came together to support each other and the community," reflects Abbott.

