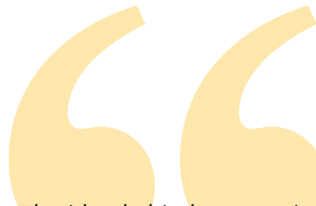


A Patient Story



James Street, PhD, MD
Colonoscopy Screening



The idea behind a screening test is that you're probably healthy, but if that isn't the case, better to find out early. Like many people, James Street, PhD, MD, chief of anesthesia at Emerson Hospital, didn't have a baseline colonoscopy when he turned 50. But with encouragement from his primary care physician and his girlfriend, Dr. Street recently had the screening test, which checks the large intestine for abnormalities, including colorectal cancer. He received a wake-up call; now, he is encouraging others to schedule a colonoscopy.

James Street, PhD, MD, recently found out what it is like to be a patient at Emerson.

"My primary care physician, Dr. Scott Paparello, reminded me a few times that I was overdue for a colonoscopy. Being a busy physician, I always found an excuse to put it off. At 60 years old, I'm an active person, I feel great, and I had no symptoms.

"In my own mind, I had overblown the difficulty of having a colonoscopy, but it turned out to be a piece of cake. The sedatives we use these days are terrific. But when I woke up afterwards, Dr. Raj Devarajan, my gastroenterologist, gave me the bad news: he found a mass in my large intestine. He said this kind of mass turns out to be cancer in the vast majority of cases. I would need to have surgery.

"It was devastating. I couldn't believe it was happening to me; I didn't feel like a cancer patient. I felt really well.

"Over the next couple of days, my attitude changed from disbelief to 'let's get this thing done.' I briefly considered having surgery elsewhere because, in the past, I worked at Brigham and Women's and Mount Auburn, and I know good general surgeons in both places.

"However, I wanted to have the procedure done at Emerson. All the general surgeons here are excellent, and I have enormous respect for them. I selected Dr. Atif Khan because he has specific interest in minimally invasive laparoscopic surgery. I've worked with Dr. Khan in the operating room so I've seen the quality of his work.

"On the day of my surgery, I arrived at the pre-op area to find a little party waiting to greet me. Mallory Harrison from the Pediatric Intervention Team – with whom I work regularly – had decked out my room with a sign that said 'Welcome, James.' She knows I'm a Star Wars geek, so she had a Star Wars poster on the wall and Star Wars toys to distract me, as we do with our pediatric patients. It was quite heart-warming.

"As chief of the department, I was able to select my anesthesia team. I could have picked anybody, because they are all very good, but I requested Dr. Gregory Gardner and Michael Altieri, a nurse-anesthetist. I remember nothing until I woke up in the recovery room. Dr. Khan said, as far as he could tell, the lesion looked fairly well-contained, which was promising.

"From there, I went to North 6, where I stayed for three days. The nursing care was fantastic, and everyone was great. It was interesting for me to observe the teamwork at Emerson – how everyone plays their own unique role while working together to provide outstanding patient care.

"I benefited from having integrative medicine. Acupuncturists Judy and Kerry Weinstein, who have worked in our department for several years, came each day to give me a treatment. I also experienced the hospital's wonderful volunteers; I received a reiki treatment from a volunteer.

"Fortunately, the pathology report on the specimen showed no invasion into other areas, which meant no need for chemotherapy, but I'll need periodic follow-up. My story has served as a wake-up call – for me and other people. I know probably a half-dozen people who had colonoscopies after hearing about my experience.

"Several of my physician colleagues have asked me what it was like being a patient at Emerson. I think I received the best care possible. And I received tremendous support and a great outpouring of affection.

"Finally, the experience has given me a much deeper insight and better appreciation for what patients go through. I definitely think it has made me a better physician."

