

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Changing Patterns of Colorectal Cancer

TO THE EDITOR: We read with great interest the report in a recent issue of this journal by Rabeneck *et al.* (1). This large study confirms that the proportion of colorectal cancer (CRC) located in the right colon has indeed increased over the last 20 yr in the United States, as has been previously noted in other geographical regions in the same period. The authors demonstrate that this increase has taken place without a corresponding rise in the incidence of right-sided CRC. They also show that the proportion of right-sided CRC diagnosed has increased as the age of the population increases.

Our published data comparing CRC diagnosed in 1976–1978 and in 1995–1997 in Northern Ireland show the same pattern of an increasing proportion of right-sided CRC over two decades (23.6% in 1976–1978 vs 35.1% in 1995–1997) (2, 3). Further data from the 1995–1997 period confirm that the proportion of right-sided CRC in Northern Ireland increases with age (34% for 41–50 yr of age vs 46% for >80 yr of age). However, our data also demonstrate that the age-standardized incidence of right-sided CRC has increased in both sexes over this period in Northern Ireland (rates per 100,000: males: 4.7 in 1976–1978 vs 9.5 in 1995–1997; females: 4.7 in 1976–1978 vs 8.7 in 1995–1997), although the incidence of CRC at other sites has not changed. Census data also show that the proportion of the Northern Ireland population over 80 yr of age has almost doubled in the period 1977–1996 (from 1.6% to 2.7%).

These data suggest that the increased incidence of right-sided CRC in Northern Ireland may be related to aging of the population. These results also suggest that different mechanisms are responsible for similar changes observed in CRC distribution in different geographical regions. Local data collection and the maintenance of local cancer registries remain

important to determine these underlying patterns in CRC distribution.

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