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Chesco firm opens first colon center

by [John George](#) Staff Writer



Mark Baumel (left) and Edward White Jr. in front of the giant doctor's bag at the site of their first colon health center: the Apex Medical Building in Newark, Del.

A Chester County company intent on changing how people are screened and treated for colon cancer has opened its first center in Newark, Del.

Colon Health Centers of America, based in Mendenhall, was founded last year by Edward White Jr. and Dr. Mark Baumel.

Baumel, who describes himself as a physician entrepreneur, was previously chief medical officer of **Mercy Health System** in Conshohocken. He also

worked as a consultant for physician practices. White is the former owner and operator of a chain of imaging facilities in Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland.

The duo spent the past two years developing their business, which grew out of statistics that showed the colon-cancer screening rate among eligible Americans is less than 40 percent.

“One of the major reasons people aren’t screened is the invasiveness of the [colonoscopy] test,” Baumel said. “Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths, 90 percent of which could have been prevented if the people had been screened properly.”

Colonoscopy, the typical procedure used for screening people for colon cancer, requires viewing the inside of the colon through an endoscope inserted into the rectum.

The Colon Health Center of Delaware, which opened earlier this month, combines a newer non-invasive technology in the form of CT colonography, also known as a virtual colonoscopy, with traditional colonoscopy procedures.

Baumel said patients at risk for colon cancer, which includes everyone over the age of 50, can be screened non-invasively without the need for sedation or anesthesia using CT colonography. The device produces an image that is, in essence, a high-tech, three-dimensional digital image of the interior of the colon.

CT colonography can only be used as a diagnostic tool. Those found with pre-cancerous polyps, he said, will be provided with access to a same-day colonoscopy for polyp removal — eliminating the need to repeat the unpleasant bowel-cleansing requirements.

The company's business strategy is to form partnerships with gastrointestinal physicians who operate community-based endoscopy centers.

Its first center in Newark was created through a partnership with **Mid-Atlantic GI Consultants**.

Colon Health Centers enables the doctors to add CT colonography to their existing colon-cancer screening services augmented by "same-day, same-prep" colonoscopies for polyp removal when warranted.

The company handles all the regulatory compliance and design issues for the centers along with payer negotiations, equipment procurement and staff hiring and training.

Baumel estimates the cost of establishing the center at about \$1 million.

The company's long-term plan is to create a nationwide "consumer brand" for screening services, and provide direct-to-consumer marketing to educate Americans about the importance of colon-cancer screenings.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Delaware is covering CT colonography screening under a pilot program that began with the opening of the Newark facility.

"We're doing this mainly because we want to encourage people to get colon-cancer screening," said Dr. Paul Kaplan, the Wilmington-based insurance company's chief medical officer. "Colon cancer is a treatable disease."

While the pilot is initially limited to Colon Health Centers' Newark facility, the program will be expanded to other locations if the results are favorable.

Baumel said he'd like to open several more centers before the end of this year, but that will be largely dependent upon private health insurers' willingness to cover the service.

The Philadelphia region's largest health insurer, **Independence Blue Cross**, covers CT Colonography. IBC this week launched its own pilot program with **Quest Diagnostics** aimed at increasing awareness of the importance of annual colon cancer screenings.

Colon Health Centers, meanwhile, is talking with dozens of GI practices interested in the company's virtual colonoscopy concept.

"We see virtual colonoscopy as the wave of the future and a way of getting those 60 percent people not getting tested off the screening sidelines," Baumel said.

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