

# Anthony Zaldonis, M.D.

## Saint Francis gastroenterologist aims to “Wallop those Polyps”

Over the last 14 years, gastroenterologist Anthony Zaldonis has taken part in 11 medical mission trips to Nicaragua, bringing much needed endoscopic supplies and medical expertise to the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua-Leon. The Saint Francis physician has taken on a different kind of mission here in Hartford County: to increase the number of patients getting screened for colon cancer.

The good news, according to Dr. Zaldonis, Director of GI Endoscopy at Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center in Hartford and Medical Director of Saint Francis GI Endoscopy in Windsor, is that the incidence of colon cancer is declining in the United States. The bad news: It is still the second leading cause of cancer deaths after lung cancer. Approximately 49,000 people die each year from the disease, but many of these deaths could be prevented, Dr. Zaldonis says.

“Most cancer screening, like mammography, works to detect cancer at an early stage when it is most curable,” says Dr. Zaldonis, who is also a clinical assistant professor of medicine at University of Connecticut School of Medicine. “In contrast, because the vast majority of colon cancers arise from benign polyps, colonoscopy offers something better than early detection-prevention.” When Dr. Zaldonis and his colleagues find polyps (benign tumors on the inside lining of

the large intestine) during a colonoscopy, they are routinely removed, so that these polyps never have the opportunity to progress into cancer. “The National Polyp Study has shown that patients who had their colon polyps removed had as much as a 90 percent reduction in subsequent development of colon cancer, making colon cancer the uniquely preventable cancer,” Dr. Zaldonis says.

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According to National Cancer Institute statistics, the incidence of colon cancer has fallen by about 3 percent per year over the last decade, and experts believe that much of this decrease is due to the fact that more people are coming in for screening exams. But while the colon cancer screening rate increased from 52 percent in 2002 to 65 percent in 2012, the last year for which statistics are available, more than a third of those who should be

getting colonoscopies are still not doing so.

Dozens of groups dedicated to eliminating colon cancer, including the American Cancer Society and the American College of Gastroenterology, have initiated a campaign to raise the nation’s colon cancer screening rate to 80% by the year 2018. Saint Francis GI Endoscopy has launched its own campaign locally, sending out more than 40,000 educational mailings to primary care physicians and area residents 50 and older, and erecting billboards along Interstate 84 emblazoned with the battle cry “Wallop those Polyps.”