

# Lung cancer screening effective, study shows

Low-dose CT scans reduce lung cancer deaths by 20 percent.

By **Hannah Poturalski**  
Staff Writer

A new screening program at UC Health has marked its first year of testing high-risk patients for lung cancer.

Prior to 2011 – when the National Cancer Institute first published data supporting chest computed tomography (CT) scans as an effective lung cancer screening tool for high-risk populations – there were no effective measures for catching the early stages of lung cancer, said Dr. Jo Ann Rivera, a UC Health primary care physician in Mason.

About 150 patients have been screened during the first year of the program at locations in West Chester Twp. and Cincinnati. The National Cancer Institute's study showed there was a 20 percent reduction in lung cancer-related deaths when heavy smokers were screened with low-radiation dose CT scans versus traditional chest X-rays.

"I'm excited because finally there's something out there that could potentially save people's lives," Rivera said. "Chest X-rays only really show something late stage."

Rivera said the lung cancer screening program has an out-of-pocket cost of \$99 – but the patient is followed by a multi-disciplinary medical team and offered a free, three-month smoking cessation program



Dr. Jo Ann Rivera, of UC Health Primary Care (Mason), with Dr. Garvin Nickell, has a mission to raise awareness for lung cancer. Both her father and father-in-law died from lung cancer. GREG LYNCH / STAFF

## UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI CANCER INSTITUTE COMPREHENSIVE LUNG CANCER CENTER LUNG CANCER SCREENING PROGRAM

**Call:** 513-584-LUNG

**Online:** [www.uccancer.com/lungcancer](http://www.uccancer.com/lungcancer)

**Locations:** University Pointe Surgical Hospital Imaging Center, 7690 Discovery Dr., West Chester Twp., and University of Cincinnati Medical Center, 234 Goodman St., Cincinnati.

**Cost:** \$99

## **LUNG/BRONCHUS CANCER INCIDENTS IN BUTLER COUNTY**

**Average annual number  
of new invasive cases**

**2001-2005:** 251 cases

**2006-2010:** 263 cases

Source: Ohio Department of  
Health, 2013

# **Cancer**

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led by a physician.

Those recommended for the program are men and women between the ages of 50-79 who have smoked a pack of cigarettes per day for more than 30 years, or two packs a day for 15 years, Rivera said.

Dr. Sandra Starnes, co-leader of the UC Cancer Institute Comprehensive Lung Cancer Center, said the CT scans allow lung cancer specialists to view the lungs one "slice" at a time. Nodules that are too small to show up on a chest X-ray are more likely to be detected.

"Screening ... is used to identify unrecognized disease in people who have no signs or symptoms in an attempt to intervene earlier when disease is generally more treatable," Starnes said.

Ohio has one of the highest rates of lung cancer-related deaths in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Rivera said lung cancer kills more people each year than breast, colon, prostate and pancreatic cancers combined.

Rivera said about 85 percent of lung cancer cases are related to smoking and could have been prevented.

In Butler County, about 25 percent of adult residents currently smoke cigarettes, according to the most recent data from Ohio Department of Health.

The cause is close to Rivera's heart as both her father and father-in-law died from lung cancer at an early age, and her mother was diagnosed last year.

"The best way of treating lung cancer is prevention," Rivera said. "A lot of people use (smoking) as a crutch to cope. Some people really aren't ready, no matter how much you reason with them, they are not motivated."

Three of the 12 patients Rivera referred to the cancer screenings were able to catch the early stages of lung cancer. She said two have had surgery and are now being monitored.

"It encourages them to stop smoking and if they have (lung cancer), the chances of surviving are better," Rivera said.

Diana Mummert, of Salem Twp. in Warren County, is a patient of Rivera's that was referred to the program. Mummert said two nodules were found on her lungs following the initial CT scan.

She said the nodules haven't changed in size or characteristics after two follow-up screenings. She said her nodules aren't cancerous but will be checked again in a year.

"If it had been cancer, the nice thing about this is you can find it in early stages and have a better prognosis," Mummert said.

Mummert said before participating in the lung cancer screening, she smoked a pack of cigarettes a day for 40 years. She said Dr. Rivera urged her to stop smoking over the years, but the recent scare from the nodules put her over the edge.