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**WALES 'ISN'T READY FOR LIFE-SAVING CANCER SCREENING
PROGRAMME'**

Wales is not prepared for the kind of life-saving bowel cancer screening programme about to launch in England, according to new research.

A study presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the British Society of Gastroenterology in Birmingham, found that there are not enough of the specially trained healthcare professionals who can follow up the initial screening test and identify who does, and does not have bowel cancer. Bowel Cancer kills about a thousand people in Wales every year.

Dr Miles Allison, Consultant Gastroenterologist at the Royal Gwent Hospital in Newport said: "Wales is not yet ready for the kind of screening programme for bowel cancer that is about to launch in England."

Of the 63 doctors carrying out the follow-up test - a colonoscopy - only nine (14%) are doing the procedure well enough to provide colonoscopy in a bowel cancer screening programme. The rest do not meet the quality standards laid down by the English screening programme, which is launching later this year.

Dr Allison said: "The thing that's stopping most people from meeting the standards is the number of procedures you have to do which is 3-4 a week. Many gastroenterologists just do not have the time to do that, many because of their other clinical commitments, so one option is to train specialist nurses to carry out these procedures."

Some of those who carry out colonoscopy do not adequately document their procedure outcomes to confirm that they meet quality standards. "We need to change the culture of the colonoscopy service in Wales to improve record keeping before we can begin a bowel cancer screening service."

Dr Allison said there was hope on the horizon because the Welsh Assembly government has recently made funds available to train more people.

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Notes to editors:

- Bowel cancer is a disease of the large bowel or rectum. It is sometimes called colorectal or colon cancer
- Bowel cancer is the second most common cancer in men and the third most common cancer in women in the UK
- Bowel cancer kills about 1,000 people a year in Wales, the highest rate in the UK
- Currently only 10% of bowel cancers are caught at an early stage but around nine out of ten will survive if diagnosed early