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Jager devotes career to a disease people are reluctant to discuss

FINALIST

Physician



Rama M. Jager, MD, PhD,
Colon and Rectal Care Center

Rama Jager wants people to start talking more about colon cancer. With additional screening and dialogue, he thinks this killer can be stopped. He's been working to do this in Indianapolis for 28 years through multiple campaigns in the city.

"Colon cancer is a cancer that can be totally treated with an aggressive approach," said Jager, who started the Colon and Rectal Care Center and is a finalist for the Health Care Heroes physician award.

In addition to that, Jager was one of the first surgeons to perform outpatient anorectal surgery in the city when it was only performed on an inpatient basis. He performed the first laparoscopic colectomy in Indianapolis and helped change how the colorectal society treats early-stage hemorrhoidal disease.

"I came here four years ago because of him. I had job offers around the country," said Shekar Narayanan, who works with Jager at the Colon and Rectal Care Center. "He has been such a leader in this field. Everybody knows him. He built his own center and revolutionized colon rectal surgery."

Colorectal cancer is the fourth most common cancer in men, according to the National Cancer Institute. Treatment is more likely to be effective when the disease is found early. But many are reluctant

to be tested.

"It's a type of problem people don't talk about," Jager said.

However, with health care providers like him setting up screening centers and opening dialogue, these medical conditions are getting more attention.

Jager is also relentless in his search for knowledge in the colon and rectal field. "He has an incredible self drive to make sure his patients are receiving the best and newest treatments," Narayanan said.

"When one surgeon practices superior care, the scale and standards diffuse across the state," Jager said. "All of a sudden what the surgeon does in superior fashion becomes the standard."

Even with his tireless effort, Jager knows he can't cure everything. Sometimes his most important job is to just make his patients as comfortable as possible. In doing this, he treats people like family.

"The surgeon must have compassion and view himself as a patient. My motto is: Anything I do for my wife, sister, father-in-law or brothers, I would do the same thing for my patients," Jager said.

These patients of his are true heroes, he said.

"I see patients with advanced cancer who think they have hemorrhoids," Jager said. "Once I make the diagnosis, they



ask very calmly, 'How much time do I have to live?'"

Many others live with painful intestinal conditions like Crohn's Disease.

"My patients are my models," Jager said. "A lot of times patients are so sick, they suffer continuously. I don't know how they get their jobs done. They come in with a smile. I tell them what needs to be done and they follow it to the letter."

—Stacey McArthur