

Staying the course for a colonoscopy

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

Shelli Dankoff – Media Relations Supervisor

In late June, musician – and husband of Kourtney Kardashian – Travis Barker put the word pancreatitis on the social media radar when he asked for prayers in a Tweet as he was hospitalized in severe pain with that diagnosis. The most common cause of acute pancreatitis is usually from gallstones and while most cases resolve quickly, some can have life-threatening complications.

“The pancreas is a digestive organ, sits right in the middle of the belly. Pancreatitis really means simply inflammation of the pancreas,” explains Jason Bill, M.D., a gastroenterologist for OSF HealthCare in Peoria, Illinois who specializes in interventional endoscopy.

It was initially reported the 46-year-old Barker developed pancreatitis as the result of a colonoscopy, a procedure in which a scope is inserted into the rectum (that was later corrected to an endoscopy in which the scope is inserted down your throat and into the esophagus).

Dr. Bill says he was surprised to hear the original potential connection between Barker’s pancreatitis and a colonoscopy. He says while it is theoretically possible if the tip of the scope were to hit the tail of the pancreas during the procedure, he and others who have done thousands of colonoscopies have never seen the complication.

“The benefit of a colonoscopy by far outweighs the risks. You know, when we hear these things happen, there's such a large media presence behind celebrities having things happen and we can't really prove that the colonoscopy caused it. Right now it's just kind of correlation based on timing. It theoretically can happen, but I don't know how much I can stress that it is extremely rare,” says Dr. Bill.

Dr. Bill adds they are seeing a rise in colorectal cancer in younger people, so his threshold of when to perform a colonoscopy has gotten lower. He encourages anyone with rectal bleeding and other colorectal-based symptoms, even when in their 30s and early 40s, to get a colonoscopy just to be safe.

“I wouldn't focus on this one, you know, very rare adverse outcome. I would not let that sway you. Clearly we have a lot of evidence that supports colonoscopy for many different reasons. And so please don't let this sway your opinion on getting screened for colon cancer.”

Learn more about what is involved with a colonoscopy [here](#).