High Resolution Anoscopy (HRA)

What is high resolution anoscopy?  
High Resolution Anoscopy (HRA) is a very detailed examination of the anus and perianal area. HRA is performed using a colposcope (a device similar to a microscope) and an anoscope (a small, short tube inserted into the anus to allow inspection of the skin inside). HRA allows us to determine if there is a precancer or cancer in your anus, and, if present, helps us find where it is located.

Who needs high resolution anoscopy?  
Most patients who need HRA have had an abnormal anal Pap test. The abnormal anal Pap test may indicate the presence of a precancer or cancer in your anus. HRA is also recommended for women who have certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV) in the anus. HRA may help to evaluate rectal bleeding or a mass found during a digital rectal examination. Finally, HRA is commonly done after surgery or treatment to ensure that all of the disease was successfully removed from the anus.

How can I prepare for anoscopy?  
Please refrain from anal sexual intercourse at least 48 hours before the procedure. Try to empty your bowels prior to the procedure. You do not need to use an enema before the exam. The most important thing you can do in preparation for your appointment is to relax. If you are especially nervous, you may want to bring someone along with you for support.

How is HRA done?  
You will lie on an examination table on your left side. Using a finger, your anal area will first be checked for potential problems. In order to help us see your anal tissue, a lubricated anoscope will then be inserted about two to three inches into the anus. A vinegar solution is then applied in the anus. This may cause some stinging. The vinegar solution causes abnormal cells to temporarily turn white. These white areas contrast with the rest of your pink anal skin. Occasionally, an iodine solution may be used that temporarily makes the abnormal cells turn yellow and normal tissue turn brown. The iodine solution will not burn. Thereafter, a careful magnified examination of the anus will be done. You may feel some pressure during the exam. You may also feel the need to have a bowel movement.

What happens if an abnormal area is found in my anus?  
When an abnormal area is found, a tiny sample of this tissue, called a biopsy, will be taken from the anus. Some patients don’t feel the biopsy being taken. Others may feel a quick pinch. After the biopsy, the small wound is treated to stop bleeding. The tissue sample will be sent to the lab to determine whether the area is truly abnormal. We will then call you within two weeks to discuss the laboratory findings.
What happens if the biopsy result is abnormal?
The next step depends on what was found during the HRA exam. If your biopsy result is normal or only very slightly abnormal, no treatment may be necessary. In this case, you may need more frequent anal Pap tests or another HRA exam to monitor your condition for any change. In the event that more serious disease is found, we will discuss treatment options with you.

What can I do after HRA?
If a biopsy was taken, you may have some slight spotting for a few days, particularly with bowel movements. If you have heavy bright red rectal bleeding that lasts for more than 15 minutes, please notify us immediately. You may also have a black rectal discharge. This is normal and is caused by a chemical agent that was used to stop bleeding after the biopsy was taken. You may take ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) or Tylenol if you have any discomfort. Usually, you can easily return to work by the next day after HRA. If you had a biopsy, you should not have anal intercourse, or place anything in your anus for about one to two weeks to allow your anus time to heal.

Who can I contact if I have questions?
We are glad to answer any questions you may have. If you have any questions prior to or following your appointment, please call the triage nurse at the MCGHealth Cancer Center at 706-721-6744.