

## **LIVING WITH COPD**

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COPD is a common, preventable, and treatable disease. It is characterized by airway limitations that are progressive and associated with chronic inflammatory responses in the airways of the lungs to irritating particles or gases. This disease is the fourth leading cause of death in the world. COPD is under-recognized and under-diagnosed. The COPD burden is projected to increase in coming decades due to continued exposure to risk factors and aging of the population.

The key indicators for consideration of a COPD diagnosis are:

- Dyspnea (shortness of breath) that is progressive, persistent, and worse with exercise
- Chronic cough may be frequent or intermittent and unproductive or productive of sputum
- Chronic sputum production, any pattern of production, may indicate COPD
- History of risk factors like tobacco smoke, smoke from cooking or heating, or occupational dusts and chemicals
- Family history of COPD

The goal of our work with a patient, who has COPD and their family, is to:

- Reduce symptoms by providing relief
- Improve exercise tolerance, health status, and quality of life
- Reduce risk by preventing disease progression
- Educate to assist our patient/family to take control of their disease
- Prevent disease aggravations requiring hospitalizations or readmissions
- Reduce mortality

You may have heard the acronym COPD used synonymously with emphysema or asthma. This is incorrect according to the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease, an International Group of National Physicians and Researchers. Each of these 3 diseases shares some component but are not the same disease according to the 2013 Global Strategy for the Diagnosis, Management, and Prevention of COPD.

Ongoing assessment, monitoring, and possible treatment of symptoms include:

- Identification and evaluation of exposure to risk factors
- Monitoring disease progression
- Assessing effects of treatment, improvement, and/or adverse effects
- Exacerbation risk
- Assessment of symptoms of a patient's other diseases which impact COPD

Assessment and monitoring of symptoms are crucial to manage COPD and its progression. Avoidance of hospital admissions and readmissions is a sign of quality care. Avoidance of admissions reduce economic, emotional, and physical burden for our

patients, families, community, insurers, and health care costs. The Accountable Care Act is about reducing those burdens.

Our patient, family, physician, therapy, and nursing staff goals regarding treatment often include helping the loved one stay in their own home, safety, comfort, hospital avoidance, bathing, housekeeping, and other personal goals. These goals are most successfully reached when each member of the team (patient, family, and care staff) is knowledgeable about the disease, and its effects, and communicate and plan together.

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