



Raising the profile of the Importance of Lung Health

By Barb Saunders
Picture a person of any age coughing uncontrollably, wheezing and gasping for air. During an asthma attack it is difficult to breathe out. While more and more air gets trapped inside the lungs, you feel like you can't breathe in or out!

Recently, David Suzuki was talking to students at the University of Waterloo suggesting that the government should be talking about dramatic increases in asthma and linking that to the number of cars and trucks on the road every day. The Government of Canada program called the One-Tonne Challenge asks Canadians to reduce annual greenhouse gas emissions by one tonne with a goal to protecting our climate and having cleaner air and healthier communities.

Inspiring people to change their habits isn't easy. Clean air, although it sounds lovely, doesn't have a strong visual impact. Even on the smoggiest day in Toronto, you can still see the CN Tower through the haze. Experiencing or witnessing an asthma attack, however, leaves an impact that you will not soon forget.

Chronic respiratory diseases such as Asthma and COPD are on the rise in Ontario and this places additional strain on pri-



Janice Woychshyn, a Respiratory Therapist from The Royal Victoria Hospital of Barrie, with one of her patients from the Asthma Education Centre.

mary care family physicians. The increasing burden of managing this strain has led the MOHLTC to propose the latest model for Primary Care Reform – Family Health Teams (FHT).

"The Family Health Teams concept is a positive step towards healthcare renewal in Ontario and has the potential to create new career opportunities for many health professionals including Respiratory Therapists (RRTs) within Primary Care. RRTs who have additional training as Asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), and smoking cessation educators/counselors may provide a much needed

service to primary care physicians," said Donna Dupont, Respiratory Therapist and Asthma Educator at Markham Stouffville Hospital.

The health-care system is set up to treat and not necessarily prevent a person from getting ill, yet most often, a health issue in one area of the body leads to stress and impacts other parts of the body. The Family Health Team approach connects interdisciplinary health professionals that work together to provide the best possible care for patients.

"Everything is connected and everyone needs to work together. Respiratory diseases

are number one in prevalence but whether it is nutrition, cancer or diabetes, there are links between all of these diseases," said Dupont.

There can be barriers to getting treatment for managing a chronic respiratory condition:

- getting a referral to an asthma clinic or COPD program
- misperception of who needs asthma/COPD education and management or respiratory rehabilitation
- being more focused on tests rather than education
- patients misinterpretation and perception of shortness of breath
- patients inability to afford the drugs required to control symptoms

"Early diagnosis and early treatment is so important for treating and preventing the progression of respiratory disease. Patient education is an important part of chronic disease management because it develops the patient's self-management skills. And with the current long waiting list to see a

Respirologist, people are not always getting the care they need when they need it," said Dupont. She believes the new vision for health-care reform has the potential to reduce the burden on hospitals and improve primary care that focuses on promoting not only respiratory health, but health in general.

Promoting respiratory health connects well with the government's proposed Smoke-free Ontario Act that would take effect May 31st 2006. Awareness, education and empowerment—this is what prevention and disease management is all about.

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World Asthma Day is May 3rd.

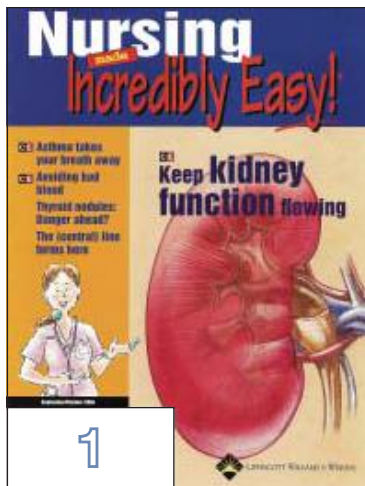
Respiratory Therapists promote patient education in hospital and community settings, helping to deliver information about improving lung health.

The College of Respiratory Therapists of Ontario is dedicated to ensuring that respiratory care services provided to the public by its members are delivered in a safe and ethical manner.

The Respiratory Therapy Society of Ontario is devoted to the promotion of respiratory Therapy in Ontario.

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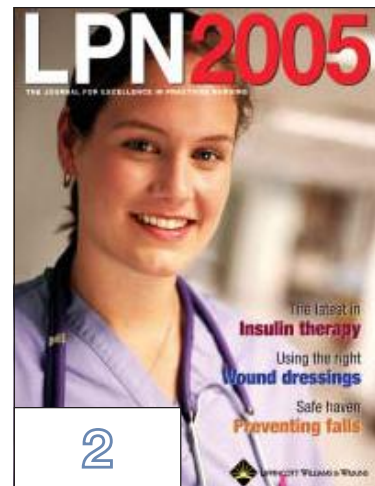
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