

Did You Know? Five facts about chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

(StatePoint) For many of the 12 million Americans with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or COPD, breathlessness, coughing and mucus production may not be symptoms of a nagging cold, but serious, daily effects of a progressive, irreversible lung disease that includes the respiratory illnesses chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

While COPD is a leading cause of death and disability in the U.S. and worldwide, many Americans are not aware that the disease even exists.

"Awareness is important to help ensure people are being diagnosed and treated properly," said Dr. Antonio Anzueto, a pulmonary specialist and professor of medicine at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. "Symptoms of COPD -- such as shortness of breath and a lingering cough -- can often be attributed to something else. With increased awareness, we are able to diagnose and treat COPD earlier, which can limit the amount of lung damage and help improve the quality of life for patients."

Facts You Should Know About COPD

- COPD is the third leading cause of death in the U.S. and kills more than 120,000 Americans each year. That's approximately one death every four minutes. In recent years, COPD death rates for women have risen steadily. Today, more women than men die from COPD each year.
- Only half of the people living with COPD in the U.S. have been correctly diagnosed, potentially leaving an additional 12 million Americans with undiagnosed COPD. One reason for under-diagnosis is that the symptoms of COPD can be mistaken for other conditions, such as asthma, another chronic inflammatory lung disease. While COPD and asthma have similar characteristics, they are two distinct conditions with varying treatment strategies.
- Smoking is identified as the most common risk factor for COPD. However, as approximately 20 percent of smokers develop COPD, it is believed that genetic and environmental factors can also influence the risk of developing COPD. It is also now recognized that 10 to 20 percent of COPD patients have never smoked. Nonetheless, smoking accounted for as much as 90 percent of COPD-related deaths.
- The assessment of COPD should determine the severity of airflow limitation in the lungs, the impact of symptoms on a patient's health and a patient's future risk of events, such as a COPD flare-up or exacerbation that could lead to physician office visits or hospitalization. This evaluation helps determine the progression of disease and guide therapeutic recommendations for each patient.
- While there is no cure for COPD, it is manageable. Lifestyle changes, such as smoking cessation, healthy eating and exercise, are recommended for COPD patients. According to Dr. Anzueto, "Shortness of breath can steer COPD patients away from exercise. However, there are many health benefits from regular exercise that can help COPD patients." Pulmonary rehabilitation, which includes breathing strategies and exercise training, can help improve

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Written by

Wednesday, 01 May 2013 14:08

COPD symptoms. Various prescription medications are also available to help COPD patients at all stages of severity manage their disease. Dr. Anzueto recommends that COPD patients speak with their doctor about the available treatment options.

"Today, treatment options are available that can help people with COPD, no matter how severe their disease," said Dr. Anuzeto. "When medications are combined with healthy lifestyle changes, many people with COPD find that they can continue doing the things they love doing."

For further information about treatment options and COPD, visit www.MoreMatterswithCOPD.com