

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE WITH PATIENTS WITH ASTHMA

Niagara Medical Group Family Health Team

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Introduction

The goal of the Respiratory Program is to support patients in self-management of their Asthma. Once patients understand the difference between controlled vs uncontrolled Asthma, they are able to manage their Asthma more effectively and achieve a better quality of life. Patients referred to the Niagara Medical Group FHT Respiratory Program present with symptoms of dyspnea, cough or recurring bronchitis. Spirometry testing is done on patients if there is no confirmed diagnosis. If they have already been diagnosed with spirometry, they are tested to check their current lung volumes. Once diagnosed with Asthma, the goal is to work collaboratively with the patient and have them learn how to control and manage their respiratory symptoms through Asthma trigger avoidance, ensuring their respiratory medications are initiated, and reviewing their inhaler technique to make sure that it is correct. Asthma education is the key to adherence and empowering the patient to manage their symptoms. Through the implementation of a respiratory education program, it was apparent that the patients we've seen had uncontrolled Asthma and benefited from the program.

Referrals by MD/NP

Please see patient for spirometry. She gets chest colds that last a long time about once per year. She has a 30+ pack per year smoking hx and is still smoke about ¼ ppd. She says she was diagnosed with Asthma and takes Flovent and Salbutamol when she gets sick like this. Can you see her when she is feeling better to do spirometry and get some **diagnostic clarification** so she could have her therapy tailored appropriately? Please see this 27 year old woman for spirometry. Her small children likely have Asthma. They all get recurrent coughs through winter. She still smokes though is cutting down. I wonder if she has **underlying Asthma.**

PFT – episodes of wheezing and frequent cough but no specific dx of Asthma yet. **Feels she does not know how to use puffers and is afraid of using them.**

? Asthma – Please see this 19 year old women for chronic cough, query Asthma related, it has been ongoing for a month or more. She has some sputum production. She tried a nasal steroid without relief. She does not have GERD symptoms or a fever, chills and dyspnea.

Spirometry for Asthma – Please see this 34 year old women for spirometry. This is her second exacerbation in 6 months. She has doubled up her Flovent, is still having symptoms so we started her on a short course of Prednisone and Singulair. Could you please test her in 2-3 weeks.

Spirometry and Asthma education – The key to adherence

The key to adherence and empowering the patient who wants to work on managing their symptoms, starts with pathophysiology about Asthma. Understanding the inflammatory process and the actions of Asthma medication gives patients a better understanding of their spirometry results. The patient will agree to take the prescribed inhalation medication if they understand why it is necessary, as well as seeing the results from their spirometry.

Asthma education follow-up

After identifying with patients that they do have uncontrolled Asthma, a follow-up appointment is the first step for them in self-managment. **An Asthma diary** helps patients track Asthma symptoms, medication use, peak flow meter readings and Asthma triggers. An Asthma diary will help patients in understanding their Asthma level of control as well as identify known and suspected triggers that are aggravating their Asthma. Tracking medication helps patients remember to take their

controller medication as prescribed as well as show how often they need to take their rescue inhaler. The use of a peak flow meter helps patients understand how triggers and environmental exposure can cause a change in their peak flows, sometimes identifying occupational exposure from their current workplace. Becoming comfortable with a peak flow is a great tool as well for identifying the level of Asthma control with an Asthma action plan. **An Asthma action plan** is initiated once Asthma is controlled. The action plan helps patients identify when they need to make changes to their inhalation medication when their symptoms become uncontrolled. Physicians and NPs support the action plan and believe that this tool is vital to the successful management of Asthma.

Patient testimonials

After starting the Respiratory Program with Terri, I was able to understand and manage my Asthma to the point where I really don't feel like an asthmatic. Through questions, medication and monitoring, Terri was able to instruct me to be in control and in tune with my symptoms. I am able to sleep through the night without using a rescue inhaler, I don't have the problem with phlegm that used to bother me daily, and there is no more wheezing and gasping for air. Wendy

Before starting the Respiratory Program, I felt like I was drowning due to not being able to breathe in or out. I wasn't even aware that I wasn't taking my puffers properly. My initial spirometry appointment also identified I had COPD and Asthma. Today I can actually breathe and my follow-up spirometry tests help me see how well controlled my breathing is today. Debbie

The Asthma program helped me understand my medications better, and why I should take them. I am not as stuffed up and I can breathe better. Tom