Working to stop asthma attacks and find a cure

Sonia Munde, head of Asthma UK Helpline and nurse manager

Every 10 seconds someone in the UK has a potentially life-threatening asthma attack and three people die every day from the condition. Tragically, evidence shows two-thirds of these deaths could be prevented by using some key elements of basic care. Also, many of these deaths occur in people with mild or moderate asthma, the kind that can be managed in primary care and with daily self-management.

This has to change. That’s why Asthma UK exists. We are a registered charity working to stop asthma attacks and, ultimately, cure asthma. We do this by supporting people with asthma so they can reduce their risk of a potentially life-threatening asthma attack — most crucially by working in partnership with healthcare professionals such as community nurses, as well as encouraging people to self-manage effectively in between appointments.

We also fund world leading research to help discover new treatments, and campaign to improve the quality of care received by people with asthma.

The 3 LIFE-SAVING BASICS OF GOOD ASTHMA CARE

Evidence shows that good asthma care is characterised by three basic elements. And all of them need the expert involvement of a primary care healthcare professional who takes asthma seriously, often a trusted nurse.

The first element is taking the right medicines and knowing how to take them correctly. The second is having a regularly updated written asthma action plan that gives key information on daily medicine routines, how to spot asthma symptoms getting worse and what to do in an emergency. And the third element is having a thorough asthma review with a GP, asthma nurse or practice nurse with specialist asthma training at least once a year to get an inhaler technique check, discuss current treatments and ways to manage symptoms better.

Two-thirds of people with asthma are missing out on these vital interventions, however. The Annual Asthma Survey 2016, showed that although 78% of people with asthma attend an annual review, fewer than half (42%) had a written asthma action plan and only one-third of people with asthma receive all three elements of basic care outlined above.

That means that two-thirds of people with asthma need the support of healthcare professionals, and of Asthma UK, to ensure that they get the care they need to stay safe, and
also do their part by taking their daily self-management seriously.

ENDING COMPLACENCY

Asthma kills an average of three people every day in the UK, which comes as a surprise to many. It ruins the quality of life for hundreds of thousands more, driving them to seek appointments in primary care for symptoms that interfere with work, family, social and love lives.

Our research revealed that asthma symptoms:
- Prevent almost one-third of people doing the things they want in their spare time
- Affect the ability of 26% of people to work or study
- Interrupt sleep for 45% of people.

Asthma UK is determined to stop asthma ruining lives. We work to make sure that people with asthma get the care they need from their nurses and GPs, and are confident and able self-managers. That means fewer symptoms, fewer emergency primary care appointments, and better health outcomes. But, we need your help.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Healthcare professionals often tell us how difficult it can be to answer all of a patient’s questions and carry out the basic checks needed during a 10-minute appointment.

Here’s how Asthma UK can support you and your patients to get the most from the time you do have together:
- Our website advice pages answer the most commonly asked questions about asthma, and encourage proactive self-management. They are Information Standard accredited, and reviewed by clinicians as well as people with asthma. Visit: www.asthma.org.uk/advice
- You and your patients can download (free of charge) lots of helpful resources, such as an asthma action plan and a guide to preparing well for your asthma review (www.asthma.org.uk/advice/resources). You can also order printed versions for a fee at: www.asthma.org.uk/professionals
- You and your patients can call the Asthma UK Helpline, which is staffed by asthma expert nurses on: 0300 222 5800. The helpline is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

You can also stay up to date with the latest asthma tips, best practice ideas and research developments for healthcare professionals by signing up to our quarterly healthcare professionals’ community email newsletter at: www.asthma.org.uk/professionals/sign-up.