

What Needs to be Done to Make Asthma Manageable

While asthma has grown in epidemic proportions across the United States, the disease has also become a manageable one for those that seek medical care and receive the proper education about their condition.

The problem is that still too many asthma patients lurch from asthma crisis to asthma crisis. An on-going Harvard University study of asthma patients at more than 100 emergency rooms found that one in five ended up in the ER at least six times a year, and as many as one in three suffered a relapse within three weeks of their visit.

Regular, daily use of prescription medicine is needed to prevent crises and poor breathing for people with moderate to severe asthma, but many people lack health insurance, or the coverage for drugs. Insurance is no guarantee, however, that asthma patients will get the right medications from their doctors. Some physicians, who are not allergy specialists or pulmonologists, may not prescribe the needed medications.

In addition, patients must be motivated to follow an action plan that includes lifestyle changes: quitting smoking, ridding the home of carpeting and pet dander, and dust. Some HMOs bolster the physician's educational efforts with regular phone calls from a national bank of trained nurses. Others mail reminder cards and asthma information to patients.

A combination of prescribing proper medication, motivating patients to modify their lifestyle – such as including HEPA air filters in their homes – and educating disadvantaged populations readily available ways to make asthma a manageable disease.

Summarized from THE RECORD, Bergen County, NJ; Article by Lindy Washburn and Alex Nussbaum)