



ASTHMA EDUCATION: THE CORNERSTONE OF ASTHMA MANAGEMENT

By *Stephanie Richardson*

For the more than 15 million Americans diagnosed with asthma, providing asthma education is an important part of health management. In fact, because asthma can affect nearly every aspect of a person's life, knowing how to manage asthma properly isn't just important for patients, but also for family and friends.

Today, asthma is treated as a chronic condition as opposed to isolated attacks. Physicians focus on daily asthma management because medication and monitoring have proven helpful in minimizing asthma symptoms. Daily management also lessens the severity of exacerbations when they occur. But equally as important is arming patients with asthma knowledge so they can more readily understand their asthma management plan.

Asthma education can help patients understand the importance of measuring their lung capacity regularly, as well as the importance of good record keeping skills. Something as simple as learning how to properly use a peak flow meter and keep an asthma diary will allow patients to track their own lung function so they know immediately if they require medical attention. Studies show when asthma patients are able to monitor their lung health, they can minimize the number of hospitalizations and emergency department visits.

Several online and out-of-the-box asthma education programs are available for all ages. Read on to see some of the options you can recommend to your patients.

Multimedia management

To date, asthma is reported to be the third-ranking cause of hospitalization among children younger than 15 years old. A new multimedia program for children and teens aids in the prevention of hospitalization through education.

Developed by a team of certified asthma educators, the program is dedicated to improving the life of children with asthma as well as their caregivers. The overall objective of the program is to meet the growing need for asthma education for prevention and management.

The program consists of a video or DVD that features a young boy who learns he has asthma. The user is guided through the asthma process by an engaging animated physician that conveys the importance of managing asthma on a daily basis in easy to understand language for children and their parents.

The program provides educational topics ranging from asthma medications, peak flows and staying in the zones, as well as understanding and avoiding asthma triggers. The program also contains

a comprehensive educational packet, including a child's storybook, a parent handbook and a coloring book.

All-inclusive asthma kits

Another new program provides complete out-of-the-box asthma management and education capabilities for patients of all ages. It features a peak flow meter, holding chamber, metered dose inhaler, self help booklets and educational videos.

The educational booklets explain what happens during an asthma episode, what triggers asthma, how to follow three-zone asthma management, how to manage asthma at school, and what you need to know about nocturnal, occupational and exercise-induced asthma.

For adults and pediatrics, videos teach asthma patients how to use a peak flow meter and what the measurements mean. The videos also demonstrate how to facilitate and improve delivery of MDI medications with a spacer or valved holding chamber.

For pediatrics specifically, the kits come with a coloring and sticker activity book that is available in English and Spanish. Cartoon animals make learning about asthma more fun for children. Through their adventures, the animals show children how they can have an active, playful life with asthma.

The characters help children learn how to manage asthma using a peak flow meter, valved holding chamber and a nebulizer to take medications. The book also features fun stickers that can be used to decorate the child's asthma management products, which is just another way to get children to work with their asthma devices.

Online asthma trackers

The Children's Asthma Education Centre (Manitoba, Canada) provides the Online Asthma Tracker on its Web site (www.asthma-education.com). The site invites adult and pediatric visitors to set up a profile and take a quiz to see if their asthma is under control. Quiz questions include:

- Have you had any asthma symptoms during the night on more than two occasions?
- Have you missed school or work because of asthma?
- Have you needed your reliever medicine more than three times a week for asthma symptoms?

If patients answer yes to two or more questions, the site will indicate their asthma is not under control and indicate why.

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Patients are then encouraged to print the quiz answers and share them with their doctor.

Each time a patient takes the quiz, his or her answers are graphed on a personal chart with a red, yellow or green mark. These indicate poor, moderate, or good asthma control, respectively. The chart also can be printed to be shared with a physician.

In addition, this Web site provides children and adults age-appropriate links for asthma education and management.

Asthma portals

For asthma patients looking for at-a-glance asthma information, several online asthma portals provide education in the form of physician Q&As, blogs, and digital media.

Health Talk® (www2.healthtalk.com/go/asthma) offers a wealth of information provided in a way that's easy for users to digest.

Asthma news can be delivered directly to patients' e-mail when they sign up for the Asthma Community. Free registration offers members 24/7 access to expert medical information and exclusive invitations to live online medical broadcasts. These online broadcasts include shows such as "Sports and Asthma: Mom, I Can't Breathe," and "Asthma and Parenthood" From Conception to Kindergarten." These broadcasts are available as Podcasts for visitors who want to download them and take them on the go.

Health Talk also feature blogs from Asthma Community members, that allow them to interact with each other, creative a virtual support group.

An "Ask the Doctor" section at Health Talk gives visitors the opportunity to post asthma questions to Beth Corn, MD, assistant professor of medicine and chief of the asthma and allergy clinic at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York. To date, Dr. Corn's medical advice has included the following topics: natural asthma remedies, long- versus short-acting asthma drugs, cigarettes and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and using inhalers correctly. A full archive provides access to her past medical advice.

A similar feature on WebMD (www.webmd.com/Paul-Enright) provides interactive Q&As with Paul Enright, MD, research professor of medicine and public health, University of Arizona, Tucson. Presented in a message board format, this information source allows users to post questions, which Dr. Enright answers timely. Because questions are so specific, it's easy to gather a wide range of asthma information by browsing the message board.

Dr. Enright also writes monthly in an asthma and allergy blog on this Web site. His blog entries discuss updates to asthma care, changes in medications and respiratory industry news, among other topics. Some blogs are linked on WebMD educational videos where readers can find more in-depth information.

Regardless of how patients receive their asthma education, it's important to let them know they have options. Whether patients need out-of-a-box asthma information or prefers to research online, there are opportunities for everyone to learn about asthma at their own pace.

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