

Transcript Details

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Addressing Asthma's Disproportionate Toll on Select Patient Populations

Dr. Birnholz:

Coming to you from the ReachMD studios, you're listening to the *Clinician's Roundtable* with a special focus on addressing disparities in healthcare. I'm Dr. Matt Birnholz. On today's program, we'll hear from Dr. Anju Peters, clinical allergist and Professor of Medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. Dr. Peters shared insights on the disproportionate toll asthma can take on select patient populations, and how clinicians can better address this disparity. Here's Dr. Peters now.

Dr. Peters:

In terms of asthma and disparities, we know that certain minority groups, such as African-Americans and Hispanics, who make up large minority groups in the US, tend to have very high rates of asthma. They tend to also have the highest asthma death rates, the highest number of ER visits, and hospitalizations due to asthma.

Why this happens is not completely clear, but we think it may be genetics. It may also be environmental risks. For example, allergens in the air can trigger asthma exacerbations, and potentially these groups are exposed more to allergens, such as cockroaches, dust mites and mold, and also to things like tobacco smoke. Potentially, minority groups, such as African-Americans and Hispanics, may not have as good medication adherence and potentially don't have primary care or specialty care access and may go to the ER or urgent care to receive their routine asthma care.

So some of the ways we potentially could reduce some of these disparities are through programs, and these include asthma education programs in the school as well as in churches, as well as in other community areas to reduce exposure to allergens, such as cockroaches and mice in inner-city homes where we know these allergens are associated with increased allergen sensitization of these patients as well as increased urgent care hospitalization and ER visits.

But we definitely need more programs to help reduce these disparities and to improve access to care including severe asthma clinics, and these programs need to be both on a local as well as a federal basis.

Dr. Birnholz:

That was Dr. Anju Peters from the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. For more episodes addressing health disparities, visit us at ReachMD.com, where you can be part of the knowledge. Thanks for listening!