Transcript Details

This is a transcript of an educational program. Details about the program and additional media formats for the program are accessible by visiting: https://reachmd.com/programs/clinicians-roundtable/burden-of-mucus-plugging-in-copd/67690/

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Understanding the Burden of Mucus Plugging in Patients with COPD

Announcer:
Welcome to *Clinician's Roundtable* on ReachMD. On this episode, we'll hear from Dr. Emily Wan, who's the Section Chief of Pulmonary and Critical Care at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System and an Associate Professor of Medicine at the University of Minnesota. She'll be sharing insights from her presentation at the 2026 GOLD International COPD Conference, which focused on the burden of mucus plugging in patients with moderate to severe COPD. Here's Dr. Wan now.

Dr. Wan:
When we're talking about mucus plugs that are captured on CT scan imaging not necessarily while the patient is sick but while the patient is in their usual state of health, mucus plugs are highly prevalent among people with COPD. The estimates range from about 30 to 80 percent depending on the study that's been reported. And the reason they're important is because they're associated with negative clinical outcomes, including future lung function loss, future acute exacerbations, as well as increased all-cause mortality. So we are learning a lot about these radiographic biomarkers.

I think that if a clinician is made aware that their patient has mucus plugs on a chest CT scan, they should be, first of all, aware that this is not necessarily the same thing as clinical chronic bronchitis, which the patient will report to you. They've actually shown that while we do detect mucus plugs at a higher frequency among people who report symptomatic chronic bronchitis, it's not the same thing, and even silent mucus plugs can be associated with these negative outcomes, like acute exacerbations, worse lung function, and worse exercise tolerance. So the clinician should be alerted that their patient, even if they're not reporting cough and phlegm, may be at risk for these clinical outcomes.

So I think that the key takeaways here are that mucus plugs on chest CT imaging are highly prevalent, they're not the same thing as chronic bronchitis, and they're associated with negative clinical outcomes, like acute exacerbations and increased mortality.

I would also love to point out the fact that this is a new area that we're becoming aware of in terms of mucus plugging and its significance. A really exciting thing that we are discovering is that mucus plugs are likely dynamic in a subgroup of COPD patients. So whether or not newer mucus plugs or resolution of mucus plugs is a targetable feature is something that we're actively exploring in the research and clinical community. So I think exciting discoveries are hopefully on the horizon.

Announcer:
That was Dr. Emily Wan talking about the burden of mucus plugging in patients with moderate to severe COPD. To access this and other episodes in our series, visit *Clinician's Roundtable* on ReachMD.com, where you can Be Part of the Knowledge. Thanks for listening!

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