Transcript Details
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How School-Based Asthma Programs Can Improve Care and Keep Students in Class

Announcer:
Welcome to *Clinician's Roundtable* on ReachMD. On this episode, we'll hear from Dr. Andrea Pappalardo Wlochowicz, who's an Associate Professor in Medicine and Pediatrics and the Allergy Service Director in the Division of Pulmonary, Critical Care, and Sleep and Allergy at the University of Illinois Chicago. She'll be sharing insights from her presentation at the 2026 American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology Annual Scientific Meeting, which focused on school-based asthma programs. Here's Dr. Pappalardo Wlochowicz now.

Dr. Pappalardo:
School-based asthma programming can run the gamut. I think the school as an intervention point for any asthma programming is imperative because schools are trusted environments. Many triggers and many factors are related, and sometimes, there's a school-based health center or a connection with care that can be accessed through the school itself.

So against that backdrop, you can have multiple ways a program can be set up. You can set it up to impact an individual student through either education, improving self-management skills, or direct care. You can have telemedicine, which has been successful. You can have school-based health centers like I mentioned. But in addition, you can really bring together partners to have more comprehensive input so the asthma is being addressed from the school in many ways. This is building a communication network between providers and the entirety of the healthcare system, which isn't really there to the extent that we would like.

In addition, you can influence emergency preparedness within the school. Make sure that they're equipped with the tools, training, and medications they require, and that's really my expertise—ensuring that the school staff, nursing, and school health are being prioritized so children at school, if they have any problems, those can be addressed and they can go back to class, learn, stay in school, and get the healthcare that they need, and that is imperative.

And then lastly, you can do things like environmental interventions where you're looking at the indoor and outdoor air quality and the structural integrity of those buildings so that those can be addressed and whatever problems there are can be mitigated so kids can breathe easier within the school.

What I found has worked the best for sustainable programming is co-leadership. You're leading with partners that are very good at these things—professional organizations, clinicians, researchers, schools, and not only schools, but the district staff and the staff within the schools—and that works tremendously well. You can't do one thing alone. You have to have a group doing it all together.

I think one of the things that people don't think about when they're thinking about school-based programming and the school as an intervention point is school-based health is not prioritized generally; education is. But education and health are inextricably linked. And this is imperative to know that if you have a child with a chronic medical condition, they're more likely to miss school, and that has a ripple effect for the rest of their lives, including their family lives with the parents or their caregiver missing work.

And so this is why it's really important to have emergency preparedness set up within the school so that people know what to do and how to do it, whether they are a trained clinician or not. They have an access point to be able to say, "Hey, this kid had a problem. And if this kid has a problem, they need more care." And the schools can be empowered to get the child that care through the families and through the networks that exist, and/or carve new ones when they need to be. And that's where health policy comes into play.

So the work that I've done a lot more recently has been around stock inhaler policies, ensuring medications are available for kids when they need them at school when they experience asthma symptoms, which we know are frequently occurring because of the multiple

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triggers and other reasons.

There are other things that you can do with health policy to make sure that things are more affordable so kids can have that extra medication available at the school and that they can see the subspecialist that they need. But then we also need to understand that education isn't just about teaching; it's about making sure children are healthy and present when they are there so that they can give back to society as they grow in a healthy way.

Announcer:
That was Dr. Andrea Pappalardo Wlochowicz talking about school-based asthma programs. To access this and other episodes inour series, visit *Clinician's Roundtable* on ReachMD.com, where you can Be Part of the Knowledge. Thanks for listening!

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