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ReachMD

www.reachmd.com

info@reachmd.com

(866) 423-7849

Breathing Through the Burden of COPD

Announcer:

Welcome to CME on ReachMD. This episode is part of our MinuteCE curriculum.

Prior to beginning the activity, please be sure to review the faculty and commercial support disclosure statements as well as the learning objectives.

Dr. Bhatt:

This is CME on ReachMD, and I'm Dr. Surya Bhatt. Here with me today is Dr. Meilan Han. Dr. Han, let's dive right in with the discussion of the clinical burden of COPD and the effect of delayed diagnosis on patients. Can you tell us how COPD affects the lives of our patients?

Dr. Han:

Thanks so much, Surya. So COPD, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, is actually the third leading cause of death worldwide, with roughly 3 million deaths annually due to COPD. The patients who have COPD though may not look or sound alike, which leads to a huge problem with respect to diagnosis. So while the global prevalence of the disease is estimated at around 10%, with many of those being over the age of 60, unfortunately, less than 6% of adults globally have actually been diagnosed. And this represents a huge problem, because these patients are often sick. They end up in the hospital, but they also develop comorbidities at an early age. It impacts our economy, with things like lost work, or caregivers having to take time off of work, and actually COPD is actually the second leading cause of reduced disability adjusted life years in the United States, which also has a huge impact on the economy.

So you might wonder, well, why are there so many patients who are undiagnosed? And I think it's really a twofold problem that relates both to primary care, as well as to the patients. We've not done a really great job educating the public about the signs and symptoms of the disease, they don't necessarily know to press their doctors for appropriate testing, which is spirometry. Primary care physicians are really limited for time, and so this may not be something that they're routinely asking or screening for, they may not ask about whether patients have activity limitation related to breathing problems. Patients will naturally scale back on some of their activities. So you really have to be thinking about it, talk to patients about their activity levels, and then know that you've got to do spirometry to get an accurate diagnosis. And unfortunately, there's a lot of primary care providers who are also somewhat uncomfortable with either ordering spirometry or then interpreting spirometry. So there's, I think, a lot of things that we could do in terms of action items, including education of the public, of patients, as well as primary care providers, to improve appropriate diagnosis for patients with COPD.

Dr. Bhatt:

Thank you, Dr. Han. So I think you brought up some very important points. And I think several patients report that they're unable to do very basic things that we all take for granted. And you brought up very nicely how much burden there is of COPD on patients and on the healthcare system. And also highlighted the underdiagnosis and delayed diagnosis, which present significant barriers to addressing the burden of COPD.

Now, there are several actionable strategies to overcome these barriers, many of which will be addressed in other MinuteCE episodes. This has been a great bite-sized discussion. Unfortunately, our time's up. Thanks for listening.

Announcer:

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