Public authorities falling short in fight against asthma and COPD

Written by Charles Kinney on 27 September 2019 in Opinion Plus

A new report by the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients’ Associations (EFA) takes a close look at asthma and COPD care across Europe.

Despite progress being made in the diagnosis and care of patients with asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), new research shows that these diseases are not being adequately addressed by healthcare professionals and public authorities.

Our latest report - Active Patients’ ACCESS Care Report on Asthma and COPD Care, Diagnosis, Prevention and Empowerment (ACCESS), finds that one third of asthma and a quarter of COPD patients have to go to the emergency room at least once a year.

These numbers are simply too high and represent a reliance on emergency care rather than managed care plans, coordinated with health care professionals.
The survey, of almost 800 patients in seven countries (Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK), gives a clear picture of patients’ access to diagnosis and care for asthma and COPD, and puts forward recommendations to overcome gaps.

It also takes a closer look at patients’ views of the prevention and support they receive, showing that much more needs to be done by health care professionals and policymakers to improve the situation for patients with asthma and COPD.

Healthcare professionals need to not only make asthma and COPD patients aware of written management plans (a quarter of respondents had never heard of them), but institute, maintain and adjust these written management plans through regular consultations with patients.

The report also reveals that COPD is dramatically underdiagnosed, with misdiagnosis taking, on average, five years to be corrected. While in some countries, like Poland, it can take up to seven years. These timeframes are too long and must be reduced.

Public authorities also need to address indoor and outdoor factors that affect asthma and COPD patient health.

Two thirds of asthma and COPD patients surveyed said that authorities are doing too little to protect them from air pollution, and nine in ten said indoor air pollution impacts their respiratory health.

"Clearly we have a long way to go to show leadership and address the reality for many patients with asthma and COPD. The ACCESS report is a very big step in the right direction" Mikaela Odemyr, President of the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients’ Associations (EFA)

With more than 700 million asthma and COPD sufferers worldwide, European and international public authorities alike must shape policy that addresses asthma and COPD patients.

Finally, our ACCESS report also reveals that further and expanded research is needed and that patient commitment to further research is there. More than half of respondents said they would like to participate in further studies with researchers and healthcare professionals.

Mikaela Odemyr, President of the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients’ Associations, said, “The ACCESS care report represents the care patients are getting at the national level.”

“It is not only a snapshot of what is happening in these countries, but also a roadmap and vital tool for
health care professionals, researchers, caregivers, policymakers and patients themselves.”

“Clearly we have a long way to go to show leadership and address the reality for many patients with asthma and COPD. The ACCESS report is a very big step in the right direction.”
The ACTIVE PATIENTS’ ACCESS CARE report of 750+ patients in seven countries provides an overview of the level of access to Care, Diagnosis, Prevention and Empowerment for people with asthma and COPD in Europe, and recommendations to overcome the gaps identified.

Prevention

- 2/3 asthma & COPD patients think authorities are doing too little in protecting from polluted air
- 9 in 10 asthma & COPD patients believe indoor air pollution impacts respiratory health

Diagnosis

- Asthma is mostly diagnosed in primary care
- Asthma severity leads to misdiagnosis
- COPD is dramatically underdiagnosed & COPD misdiagnosis takes on average 5 years to be corrected

Care

- 1/3 of asthma & 1/4 of COPD patients rely on the emergency room at least once a year
- Smoking cessation remains seriously underutilised in COPD

Empowerment

- 1/4 of patients have never heard of a management plan
- 1/2 of respondents would like to participate in further studies with researchers & healthcare professionals

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